

A SAGA ON HOME VIDEO



A GUIDE BY NATHAN P. BUTLER
SECOND EDITION - VOL. 1 OF 3

A Saga on Home Video

A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases

Second Edition (2021)
Volume I

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Jodi, who has indulged this collecting obsession with encouragement, few complaints, and a minimum of bribery required

and

To my son, Cade, for whom that same collecting obsession might one day prove itself to be either an inspiration or a cautionary tale

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A guide like this (and the collection that spawned it) benefits greatly from like-minded collectors. *Star Wars* home video collectors are a community within a community, a small niche area within a much broader fandom. We share ideas, knowledge, obscure discoveries, and sometimes even items that we no longer want or need but wish to pass along to a fellow collector.

Justin Berger's fantastic *Star Wars* Home Video group on Facebook (facebook.com/groups/swhomevideo) has become my favorite haunt on social media, where likeminded fans have gathered to share their love of collecting the films and other productions in their many forms across many formats. It remains one of the few places within online fandom where we rarely need to worry about the kind of toxicity that is so often found in other venues. My thanks to everyone who has engaged in discussion with me there and to Justin for setting up that great community.

Both within that Facebook group and among the viewership of my *From the Star Wars Home Video Library* series on YouTube, I have encountered numerous fellow fans who have shared information, helped me acquire products, and sometimes generously donated items into my collection from their own. In that regard, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Bryan Absher, Aziz Al Sumait, Anthony Baccelliere, Luke Bastyr, Emiliano M. Becco, Dan L. Beeman, Jared Bell, the aforementioned Justin Berger, Jamie Bisson, Rikter Blaksvn, Stephen Bove, Hunter Alex Brown, Owen Brown, Kozmo Bunny, Darin Chambers, Chris Clarke, Lucas Coker, Jacob Comstock, Paul de la Rosa, Matt Desrochers, David Dumbell, Ryan Dunn, Justin Farnell, Matthew Fox, Claude Franklin, Sergey Geller, Josh Gibson, Jeremy Goss, Fr. Matthew Hardesty, Sam Hatch, Michael Heckman, Hadi Heydari, Tom Holste, Sam Howard, Ron Humphris, Stephen Jenkins, Darko Jukic, Jacob Kapoor, John Keane, Arnar Marvin Kristjánsson, James Kruczek, Aleks Kruz, Paul Landis, Weston LeDoux, Neil Lowery, Jason Luttrull, Mat from Techmoan, John Maxwell, Efrain G. Mejias, Dean Mosca, George Ooi, Adam Parish, Michael Picher, Thomas Quinn, Jeff Rabjohns, Ricky Rae, Tony Reese, Ruud Renders, Justin Richert, Andrew Robinson, Rebecca Samuels, J.D. Sanders, John Scoleri, Julian Smith, Brian Snook, James Snow, Jerry Stephens, Adam Tickner, Juan Angel Vallejo III, Wiebe van der Werk, Nathan Veneman, Max Volume, Lance Worth, and the late Will Wright. I especially wish to thank both Matthew Frey and Mark Westcott, whose donation of large chunks of their own libraries into mine greatly enhanced this guide and my own collection in recent years. There are also those to thank whose full names I do not know, often only usernames, some of whom may already be listed above: ZoltonF,

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My own early interest in *Star Wars* Home Video, even before I became a collector myself, was stoked by the excellent (albeit now outdated) image collection at *SWonVideo.com*. A timeline of releases that was once maintained on *DavisDVD.com* by Patrick Mirza also served as an inspiration and foundation for an attempt to catalog such releases in my own early, meager way, within the pages of my *Star Wars Timeline Gold* before deciding that such a listing deserved a narrative guide of its own.

I am also indebted to the authors of the fantastic *Star Wars: Year by Year*, which helped clarify some of the release dates herein beyond mere years. Turnabout is fair play, I suppose. Of that great tome's writers, two of them (Dan Wallace and Pablo Hidalgo) previously referenced my fan-made *Star Wars* chronology project for their own *Essential Guides*. Other very helpful resources for release dates and other information included listings on Amazon (and its international counterparts like Amazon UK), *Blu-ray.com*, the LaserDisc Database, and *StarWarsMoviePoster.com*. (As I am not an expert by any means in *Star Wars* posters or action figures, *StarWarsMoviePoster.com* and assistance from Matt Desrochers, respectively, were invaluable when examining those items.)

I'd also like to take a moment here to apologize (only somewhat tongue-in-cheek) to fellow collectors who have seen my YouTube videos or read this guide (in its current or first edition form), only to be compelled to make more home video purchases. Fellow collector David Allen Brown coined the term "Butlered" on the *Star Wars* Home Video Facebook group, which he said was a verb that means, "When you buy lots of stuff because Nathan P. Butler shows you a video with cool *Star Wars* stuff and you realize your collection is somehow incomplete without it." As he put it, an example of the phrase in use would be: "My wife wants to speak to me in budget committee because we've been Butlered again."

Finally, I know that this guide, my personal collection, and so much more would not have been possible without the understanding and patience of my wife and fellow *Star Wars* fan, Jodi. I dove heavily into *Star Wars* home video collecting the same year we were married, and as that collection has grown, the YouTube series has taken on a life of its own, and now two editions of this guide have been in the works, she has yet to question my sanity or choices, even when sometimes the weight of a self-imposed task like this three-volume tome started to feel more like work than play and threatened to cause, rather than relieve, stress. I look forward to the day when she and I introduce our little Cade to the true depth of the *Star Wars* saga.

PATREON CREDITS

On Oct. 17, 2017, I took a chance and finally launched a Patreon (patreon.com/nathanpbutler) to help offset the costs of things like the home video purchases that form the backbone of this book. In the process, it also provided an avenue through which to provide exclusive content to supporters of my work that have been willing to put their hard-earned dollars on the line to help me keep my various projects going strong.

All supporters, whether they are Travelers Through the Butlerniverse (\$1 patrons that receive thanks in monthly update videos on Patreon and YouTube), Denizens of the Butlerniverse (\$5 patrons that also receive exclusive audio commentaries), or Nobility of the Butlerniverse (\$10 patrons that also receive exclusive Q&A videos each month on top of everything else), are appreciated, and this second edition of *A Saga on Home Video* has finally given me the opportunity to provide them with the thanks in print that they have been promised for so long.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the following Patreon supporters (Oct. 17, 2017, through Oct. 31, 2021): Ben Abrams, Joseph C. Balaich, Andrew Bettis, “BigMacDavis,” Jamie Bisson, David Bittner, Joseph Blankenship, Levi Bond, Elias Breitner, Dave Broadway, Candi Cabaniss, Craig Clayton, Jonathan Confer, Travis Cook, Bobby Craig, Martin Dahl, Matt Desrochers, Jeff Ellis, Preston Ellis, Pavel Gerasimov, Andrew Gilbertson, Mitch Godfrey, Jeremy Goss, Matthew Hardesty, Matthew Hadish, Sam Howard, Jaina Hunt, Kai Jacoby, Tony Jenkins, John, Jacob Kapoor, Kevin Kreiner, Bon Lainez, Walker Langstraat, Chris Lewis, Chris Lock, Anas Maatough, Daniel Marchant, Robert Medina, Aaron Melzak, Steven Milicia, Chris Morgan, Nathan W. Mortimer, Jeremiah Mustered, Thomas Myers, Caleb Owens, “PDotE,” Austin Pearce, Kyle Pelegri, Jonathan Pickens, Jeff Rabjohns, Jared Rascher, David Ray, Justin Richert, Alexandre Santos, Gary Sherwood, “Skytrypalasmr,” Brian Snook, Ben P. Stein, Connor Stierman, Travis Taylor, Michael Torson, Casey Urie, Chris Walker, Joey Zitzman, and my very first Patreon supporter ever, Benjamin Handelman.

PREFACE TO VOLUME I

This second edition of *A Saga on Home Video* was never meant to be a three-volume set. I had intended to add a hundred (or two) pages to the first edition, which had clocked in at a bit under 300 pages. Surely 400 – 500 pages of content would cover everything I intended to include in this updated version of the guide.

I began writing... and as my fascination with *Star Wars* home video collecting pushed me to add more topics and increase the original image count of a little over 300 grayscale pictures in the 2017 guide to over 1,500 color images in this 2021 edition, it became clear that the second edition would be a massive undertaking and – if contained in a single, physical publication – a “brick” to rival some of the home video releases it covered.

But a funny thing happened on the way to publication. Microsoft Word began to “choke” on the master file for the second edition. With so many images, the file size reached over 400 MB by the last months of 2020 with more pictures still to be taken and content to be written. It became clear that something had to give. The decision was made to separate *A Saga on Home Video*’s second outing into multiple volumes, making each more manageable from the writing *and* reading side. (After all, who wants to lug around a massive paperback that makes you worry that you are going to harm the spine when trying to see an image that extends to the page margins?)

Thus, *A Saga on Home Video* now exists as three distinct volumes that make up the “whole” guide. This volume covers the first six chapters of our decades-long journey through American *Star Wars* home video releases (and various noteworthy foreign items). *Volume I* focuses entirely on George Lucas’ six live action, theatrical films (*Episodes I – VI*, better known as the *Original* and *Prequel Trilogies*). We begin with the earliest means of viewing

segments of *A New Hope* (formerly just *Star Wars*) and *The Empire Strikes Back* at home and continue through the high definition premieres of those six films on Blu-ray and digital formats. As such, this first volume stops immediately before the home video launch of the first of the Disney era films, *The Force Awakens*, in 2016.

Two other volumes round out this makeshift “trilogy” for *A Saga on Home Video*’s second edition. *Volume II* continues coverage of the live action, theatrical films from the home video release of TFA through *The Rise of Skywalker*, *The Skywalker Saga*, and some reissues in their wake. *Volume III* then shifts coverage away from the live action, theatrical films to, well, everything else: TV series and specials (both animated and live action); *The Clone Wars* film (theatrical but animated); behind-the-scenes productions; miscellaneous items not otherwise covered anywhere else; a bit about Disney+ (with its growing library of content that may never see physical release), and a chapter of advice for *Star Wars* home video collectors. Each volume is full to bursting with new and updated information beyond the guide’s first edition, along with hundreds of new, color images taken using my own personal *Star Wars* home video library.

It is my hope that you might find this volume interesting enough to also check out the other two, as a richer, fuller picture of the saga’s journey into our homes over the last 44 years takes shape in this guide.

Welcome to *A Saga on Home Video*. Thank you for reading, and may the Force be with you.

A Brief Guide to *Volume I*

Introduction: The Making of a “Collection”

An introduction to how and why *A Saga on Home Video* was written, along with how the author’s collection began.

Chapter 1: Glimmers of Hope (1977 – 1980)

Our coverage begins with home viewing products prior to any full versions of *A New Hope*.

Chapter 2: The Great Format War (1982 – 1994)

This chapter begins coverage of full copies of the *Original Trilogy*, prior to the THX remastering process.

Chapter 3: The Original... One Last Time (1993 – 1995)

The *Original Trilogy* undergoes the THX remastering process to emerge again as *The Definitive Collection* and subsequent *THX Remastered Edition*, the last iteration of *Episodes IV – VI* before the *Special Editions*.

Chapter 4: See It Again... For the First Time (1997 – 1998)

The *Special Editions* of the *Original Trilogy* arrive on home video.

Chapter 5: Rise of DVD, Demise of VHS (2000 – 2010)

Our examination begins to include the *Prequel Trilogy* alongside the *Original Trilogy* in the period that sees DVD become the dominant home video format, prior to the launch of the live action films in high definition in 2011.

Chapter 6: The Lucas Films in HD (2008 – 2015)

After a brief mention of *The Clone Wars* film as the beginning of *Star Wars* high definition home video releases, we focus on *Episodes I – VI* as the films make their way to HD on Blu-ray and in digital form, prior to the Disney era films joining them on home video in 2016.

To be continued...

Our exploration of the live action, theatrical films on home video continues in *Volume II*, wherein the *Sequel Trilogy* and *Anthology* films join the conversation.

Coverage then expands beyond the live action, theatrical films in *Volume III*, which covers *Star Wars* television series, the animated *The Clone Wars* film, behind-the-scenes content, miscellaneous items that do not readily fit into other chapters, the somewhat frustrating topic of Disney+, and tips for *Star Wars* home video collectors.

A Brief Guide to Sidebars

Sections like this, which are set aside in separate, darker boxes, are referred to as “sidebars.” They address various related (but often somewhat tangential) topics that broaden our look at *Star Wars* on home video but are not necessarily an integral part of the American release narrative. Not all sidebar types are present in all three volumes. Three sidebar categories are new to this edition (and listed last below).

Meanwhile in [Insert Country/Region]

These sidebars focus on various noteworthy foreign releases. They often provide a contrast to the American home video market, but sometimes they are items that were just too interesting to ignore. These sidebars always note the location and date of the item(s) in question.

Forever Tinkering

George Lucas is known for making frequent changes to his films after their initial release. This category of sidebar provides brief opinions on these changes to the live action films without aiming to be a comprehensive list of those changes.

Changes for Better and/or Worse

This category is similar to *Forever Tinkering* but takes a much more comprehensive approach. It aims to detail the various changes between edits of *Star Wars* television series episodes that have been far less documented than changes to the live action films.

For a More Digital Age

These sidebars are used to call out digital releases or bonus items, whether through venues that allow digital purchases (e.g. iTunes) or streaming services (e.g. Disney+).

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video

This type of sidebar addresses Hasbro action figure releases that were designed to celebrate particular *Star Wars* home video releases (but did *not* include home video items themselves, sometimes leading to confusion).¹

Spectacles for the Spectacle

Of the 11 live action *Star Wars* theatrical films to date, 6 have been shown in 3D theatrically (with 2 more shown in 3D only at conventions), and 5 have had Blu-ray 3D releases (though only 2 of those 5 did in America). With 3D a fun niche within *Star Wars* home and theatrical viewing, this sidebar is designed to provide a look at the various *Star Wars* RealD 3D glasses produced to celebrate *Star Wars* theatrical 3D releases, which may also be used with home theater setups that use RealD passive 3D when playing Blu-ray 3D discs.

Across the Galaxy

This final category simply provides pictures of various releases from different regions side-by-side, even when not all of those releases are actually covered in their own sidebars. Why? I just find that kind of side-by-side imagery compelling and interesting, and I hope you will too.

¹ As I'm not a figure collector myself, much of the information for these sidebars comes from fellow collector Matt Desrochers.

INTRODUCTION: THE MAKING OF A “COLLECTION”

I had never intended to become a *Star Wars* home video collector, let alone a completist of any stripe. My collection evolved from innocent origins into something compulsive.

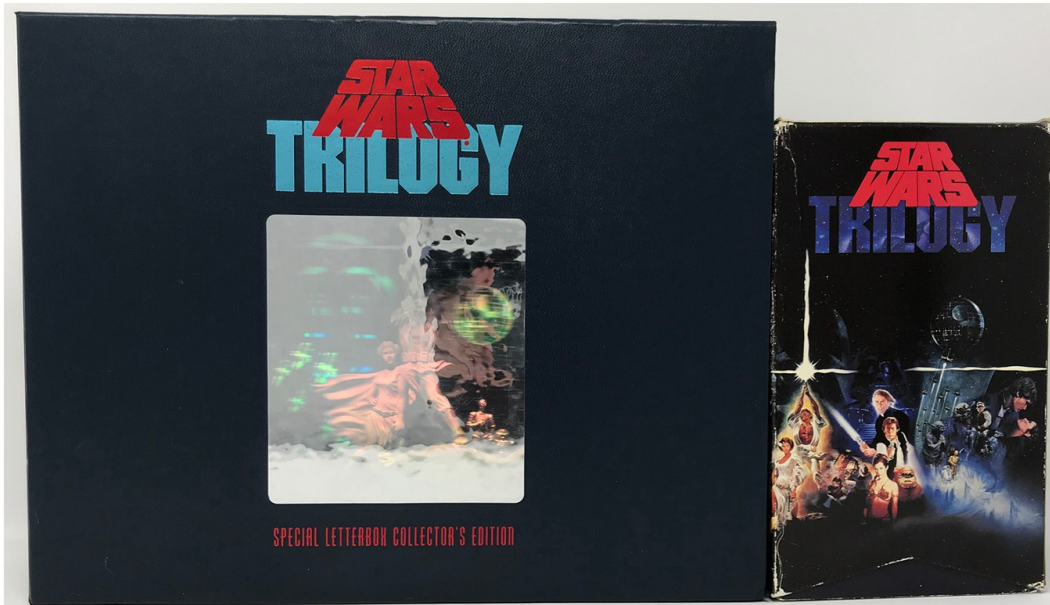
Born in 1979, I arrived on the scene too late to experience *A New Hope* (just *Star Wars* back then) in theaters during its initial run. My mother apparently took me to see *The Empire Strikes Back* as a baby, but I was far too young to form any clear memories of the experience.² It was *Return of the Jedi*, released when I was three, that really stuck with me (probably because it was firmly attached to my psyche by small, plastic nails in the form of action figures).

For the bulk of my childhood, I watched the *Original Trilogy* the only way I had available: a VHS cassette recorded from HBO and PBS that included *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Return of the Jedi*, and *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*. The original film had somehow eluded our family on television, at least when the VCR was ready to catch it.

1993 brought my first steps into a larger world. Somehow, probably through a computer game, I had acquired a Lucasfilm Company Store catalog. I had also saved (and saved and saved) allowance for a while, until I was finally able to convince my mother to place an order by phone and

² This provided a bit of irony later in life, given how much I grew to dislike parents bringing crying babies to the movies. Maybe I wasn't a crier. If I was, I'm sorry, 1980 moviegoers!

credit card.³ Along with the oft-delayed Sega CD version of the *Star Wars: Rebel Assault* video game, that fateful Lucasfilm Company Store order included the first two *Star Wars* home video items I would ever own: the 1992 Fox Video full screen *Original Trilogy* VHS set and the glorious *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition* VHS set.⁴



The two items purchased in 1993 that began my collection (and eventual obsession)

Over the next twenty years, my *Star Wars* collecting veered heavily toward the Expanded Universe (now the Legends continuity), starting with early purchases of *Heir to the Empire*, *Dark Force Rising*, and issues of *Dark Empire* in 1992, then onward to eventually include virtually all of that continuity's adult novels, comics, and other "items that mattered" (kids' books with stories that fit into continuity and the like). Meanwhile, my home video "library" was not so much a collection as an attempt to make sure that I could watch the *Star Wars* films in each of their major incarnations. I kept up my full screen and widescreen dual approach and avoided reissues like the 2000 VHS sets of the *Special Editions*, while picking up each new major iteration of the films on formats I could actually play (1995's *THX Remastered Edition* VHS sets, 1997's *Special Editions* on VHS, 2004's DVD releases, 2006's DVDs, 2011's *The Complete Saga* Blu-rays, and

³ I was only 13 – 14 at the time, so I did not have a credit card of my own yet.

⁴ Even as a kid, I wanted both widescreen *and* full screen, blast it!

the *Prequel Trilogy* films in their VHS and DVD premieres). To me, this was a “complete” *Star Wars* home video collection.

I was about as wrong as Luke was thinking he would end up with Leia.

As my Legends continuity book and comic collection wound down – the various gaps in that library filled mostly via eBay – I had taken to YouTube to produce a comprehensive video journey through *Star Wars* publishing. From 2012 into 2014, my *From the Star Wars Library* video series chronicled *Star Wars* publications from 1976 into 1993 (coincidentally the same year I picked up my first VHS sets). Then came the announcement on Apr. 25, 2014, that the longstanding official *Star Wars* continuity (recognized then as items published 1991 – 2014 but also retroactively including materials from 1976 – 1990) was being set aside as “Legends” in favor of the launch of a new canonical continuity alongside new films, all arising from the purchase of Lucasfilm by Walt Disney Company. That earlier Official Continuity became a lightning rod, and, frankly, the announcement took much of the wind out of my sails for that video series, which soon went on indefinite hiatus, from which it would never return.

The response to that YouTube series in its first couple of years, though, had given birth to what was supposed to be a much shorter spinoff series, *From the Star Wars Home Video Library*. It was a series that began in 2013 shortly after I had decided that if my Expanded Universe collection was about as complete as I wanted to make it⁵, I should perhaps start dabbling in a new form of collecting. What better thing to collect than the various other home video releases of the *Star Wars* franchise? I already had quite a few from picking up noteworthy releases over the years... or at least what I erroneously thought were “quite a few” back then. Surely it wouldn't be *that* difficult to collect *Star Wars* home video releases, especially if I focused just on the American market. How many could there be?

I look back on that decision now as my Wile E. Coyote moment. You know the one. In pursuit of the unattainable Roadrunner, the cartoon coyote takes a few steps too many off a cliff, not realizing just how far he has to fall. It is only once he looks down and sees what awaits him that he realizes his peril and begins his plunge.

That was me in 2013. I picked up some early releases of the films on VHS. I grabbed some releases I had skipped as “unnecessary” reissues. Then I looked down and realized that fully diving into *Star Wars* home

⁵ By 2019, my reading habits had shifted from physical to digital and my collecting focus had shifted so much to home video that I would sell off the vast majority of my immense *Star Wars* book and comic library.

video collecting would mean hunting down releases on VHS, Beta, DVD, CED, LaserDisc, Blu-ray, and even formats I had never even heard of. (PVD, anyone?) I could have scrambled to grab the cliff's edge and saved a lot of time and money, but instead I simply flashed a cardboard sign reading "Yikes!" and allowed myself to descend into a home video library that was far deeper and broader than I had ever anticipated.

In the time since, my collection has grown by leaps and bounds, and I have become fascinated by a side of collecting I had never truly appreciated until just shy of a decade ago. I developed a passion for *Star Wars* in its various home video releases that would have made a lesser wife finally say "enough is enough." (In a past life, my wife Jodi must have been either a saint or a collector herself.)

Now, as *Star Wars* nears its 45th Anniversary, my home video collecting and chronicling on YouTube has spanned as long as my high school and undergraduate educations combined. As a teacher by profession, a science fiction writer on the side, a student of history, and a fan of the *Star Wars* saga for as long as I can remember, *A Saga on Home Video* puts my research, collecting, and passion for *Star Wars* home video into print.

What follows in this three-volume guide is an extensive⁶ exploration into *Star Wars* home video releases in the United States.⁷ We will trace the saga from its first partial releases for fans clamoring to experience the original film at home in 1977 all the way through the most recent releases in Ultra HD as of the time of publication. Along the way, we will explore common formats like VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, DVD, three variants of Blu-ray (Blu-ray, Blu-ray 3D, and Ultra HD Blu-ray), and even some lesser known formats (e.g. CED, PVD, MiniDVD). We will follow the saga into the age of digital media. We will also, from time to time, deviate from our American focus to comment upon notable releases from outside the U.S. that contribute in some significant way to the development of the franchise on home video, draw interesting contrasts between markets, or that are just far too cool to leave out of a substantive discussion of *Star Wars* on home

⁶ I won't claim *exhaustive*, since even the most diligent collector and research is sure to miss *something* obscure, as one can see by the inclusion of some "new" older items in this edition when compared to the original publication in May 2017.

⁷ I should note here that we're looking at English language releases. For DVD and beyond, this will not make any difference. Prior to DVD, some of the releases we will explore had Spanish dubbed or subtitled versions available, but many did not. That, however, is not the purview of this guide.

video, borders be damned. Coverage has been greatly expanded for this second edition, both in terms of new releases since the first edition (e.g. *The Last Jedi*, *Solo*, *The Rise of Skywalker*) and plenty of new items added to existing chapters to make them even more extensive.

You will also encounter over 1,500 images to help guide your collecting. In order to guarantee creative control over (and the legality of) this book, I have made a point of taking every picture found in this guide myself using items from my personal collection. No cover scans or stock images here! For this second edition, the original grayscale images from the first edition have all been removed and replaced with color images (a brand new color picture instead of a color version of the original grayscale image in all but a small handful of cases⁸).

Middle School Nate could never have imagined that a couple of purchases back in 1993 would be the seeds of what would grow into an extensive (and often expensive) collection. Looking back, I am glad I didn't know what I was really getting into when I finally took that plunge.

The fall is half the fun.

Now, let's begin this dive into *Star Wars* home video together.



Magnetic tape cassette formats we will see from America include: VHS; Beta; and (in a rare instance near the end of *Volume III*) U-matic. From abroad, we will also see some Video 2000 (AKA V2000) and Video8 releases.

⁸ These exceptions include pictures of the 16 mm film reels in the first chapter (which are just too big to fit into my photo box) and the Circuit City exclusive lithographs from 2006 (which were too reflective for my photo box but looked nice in the original images from 2017).



Disc-based formats we will see from America include: CED; LaserDisc; DVD; Blu-ray; Blu-ray 3D; Ultra HD Blu-ray; PVD; and MiniDVD. From abroad, we also will also see some releases on VHD, VCD, and UMD. Can you recognize them all yet?⁹

⁹ Please pardon the reflections. Getting 11 formats into a single shot is no joke.

1 GLIMMERS OF HOPE

(1977 – 1980)

The film we now know as *A New Hope* arrived in American theaters on May 25, 1977, simply as *Star Wars*. The story of a galaxy torn by civil war, pitting an evil Empire against a valiant Rebellion, became a pop cultural phenomenon, spawned a whole new way of marketing toys and memorabilia, and cemented a place for George Lucas in the annals of filmmaking. This movie about warfare in a galaxy far, far away began just as an entirely different “war” was heating up.

The Beta magnetic tape format had been introduced by Sony in Japan on May 10, 1975, then emerged on the U.S. market later the same year.¹⁰ Rival format VHS (now meaning “Video Home System” but originally meaning “Vertical Helical Scan”) reached Japanese consumers in Oct. 1976, followed by entry into the U.S. market in Aug. 1977, just three months after the original *Star Wars* film opened in American theaters.¹¹ LaserDisc, the

¹⁰ This format is often called “Betamax.” In fact, I referred to it that way in the first edition of this guide. However, as fellow collector Anthony Baccelliere reminded me after publication, the *format* itself was officially just called “Beta,” while the *players* produced by Beta’s inventor, Sony, were referred to as “Betamax” players. Other companies, such as Sanyo, had their own Beta players with their own names. Sanyo’s, for example, was the “Betacord.” The name of the Sony player has stuck over the years, even though it is not technically accurate as the name of this cassette format.

¹¹ The theatrical release of ANH was staggered. For example, the film did not reach

first optical home video format, arrived on the American market just before Christmas 1978, courtesy of Philips Magnavox. Less than a year after *The Empire Strikes Back*'s theatrical debut in 1980, RCA's Capacitance Electronic Disc (CED) would also join the fray.¹² The so-called "Format War" had begun!

The late 1970s were the infancy of modern home video. Few could afford such extravagances. Sony's first Beta player (the SL-6200) came with a built-in 19 in. television and retailed for nearly \$2,500. JVC's earliest VHS players (TV sold separately) retailed for a more modest \$1,400. A LaserDisc player would set you back about \$750. CED players would originally cost an American consumer around \$500.¹³ (As many buyers experience with new types of televisions or video game systems today, early adopters often paid big bucks to be among the "elite" of home entertainment consumers.)

With the home video market relatively small but steadily growing for these formats¹⁴, the idea of renting (let alone purchasing) movies for home viewing was not yet the norm, but it was not entirely out of the question. A far less expensive home viewing option for adult *Star Wars* fans would come from Ken Films, while Kenner (yes, the toy company) would provide tiny doses of *Star Wars* to meet the needs of younger fans.

When Color and Sound were Luxuries (1977 – 1980)

Less than a year after the theatrical premiere of *A New Hope* (sans-subtitle), Ken Films, a distributor of quality Super 8 film reels¹⁵ with

the UK until two days after Christmas 1977, while Japan had to wait until the last day of June 1978.

¹² And that was just here in America! Other regions saw releases on VHD, Video8, Video 2000, VCD, and more.

¹³ To put that into 2020 dollars, adjusting for inflation, the cheapest of those, CED, would have run about \$1,550, while the most expensive, the Beta TV with a built-in player, would have cost the equivalent of nearly \$12,000. Buying into the home video market early for any of these four formats was no joke.

¹⁴ Okay, three of them were growing. CEDs were pretty much doomed from the start, costing RCA over half a billion dollars in losses by the time they were discontinued. (That's about \$1.1 – 1.2 billion in 2020 dollars. Ouch!)

¹⁵ I should note here that "film" is considered separate from "video" on a technical level, though still often (erroneously) referred to as "home *video*." I include film

products featuring scenes from movies distributed by various studios, released the first in a series of Super 8 reels for the *Star Wars* saga.

The original 8 mm film format (“standard 8 mm”), launched in 1932 by Eastman Kodak, had been supplanted on the home market by the company’s Super 8 (or “Super 8 mm”) in 1965. As an improvement over the original 8 mm film stock, Super 8 featured smaller sprocket holes (rectangular perforations along its edge, sometimes opposite a magnetic “sound stripe”), which allowed larger images.

By late 1977, Super 8 was far more common than any of the newer disc or magnetic tape formats, though its greatest drawback was in the sheer size and length of reels needed for full-length films. Rather than releasing anything close to the entirety of *Star Wars*, Ken Films presented “selected scenes” on reels of either 200 ft. (around 8 min. on reels about 5 in. in diameter) or 400 ft. (about 17 min. on reels about 7 in. in diameter).

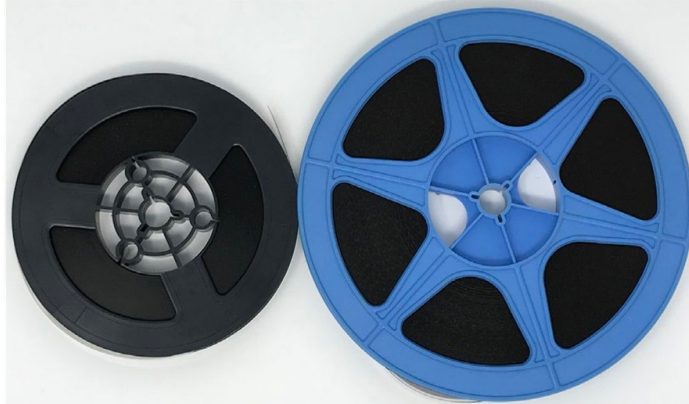


ANH 200 ft. reels (Super 8, 1977) – Top: black and white, no sound
Bottom: color without (left) and with (right) sound

The first, most basic of these releases was a 200 ft. reel featuring Luke Skywalker obtaining his father’s lightsaber from Obi-Wan Kenobi, the escape from the Death Star, and the battle during that escape. The reel included no sound and was entirely in black and white. A second version of

here as a means of “home *viewing*,” if it makes you feel better about its inclusion.

the 200 ft. reel featured color, yet still lacked sound, while a third featured both color and sound. Each was released in a cardboard box with Han Solo and Chewbacca featured on the front (top) and generic Ken Films imagery on the back (bottom). Each was labeled Ken Films product F-48.¹⁶



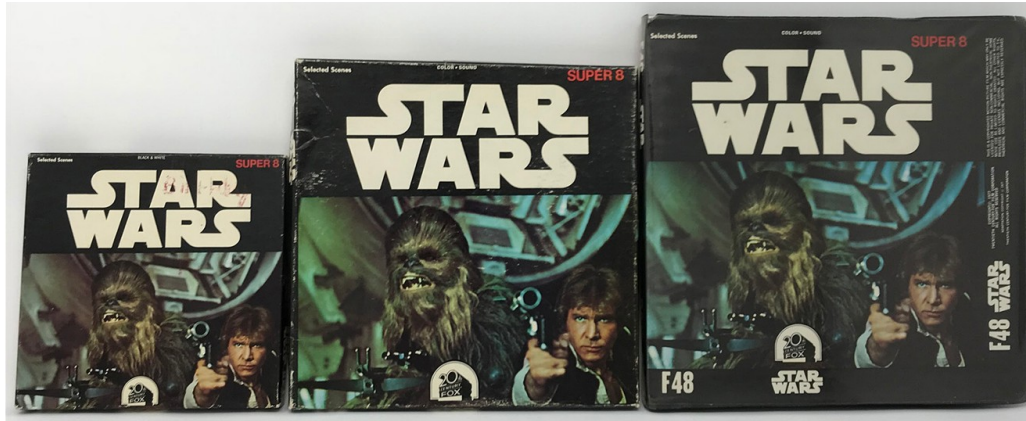
Super 8 reel size comparison: 200 ft (left) vs. 400 ft (right)

Two longer, 400 ft. reels were also produced, each featuring their own selected scenes, though not meant to be watched back-to-back to simulate a truncated viewing of the film. (To do that would require frequently switching back and forth between reels.) The first (also maddeningly listed as F-48) added material beyond the 200 ft. reels but retained the battle between the *Millennium Falcon* and TIE fighters, while the second (F-64) included scenes such as the destruction of Alderaan and the Battle of Yavin (cut down to about six minutes yet still intense). The former saw release in what was essentially an upsized version of the smaller reels' Han/Chewie packaging as well as in a so-called “clamshell” case that featured different Ken Films advertising on the back/bottom and the same tried and true image on the cover. The latter 400 ft. reel sported Tom Jung's iconic style A poster art¹⁷ and had an anamorphic widescreen counterpart that required special lenses for proper projection (unless, of course, you liked your *Star Wars* squished).¹⁸

¹⁶ That won't be confusing at all! (It gets worse.)

¹⁷ I am no expert on *Star Wars* poster art. Any information herein on *Star Wars* poster art, such as that used for home video covers or art cards, comes from research online, especially through the great resource galleries at StarWarsMoviePoster.com.

¹⁸ Anamorphic widescreen essentially narrowed an image, making it taller than it



ANH reels “Han/Chewie” packaging comparison (Super 8, 1977) –
Left to right: 200 ft.; 400 ft. box; 400 ft. clamshell



ANH 400 ft. reel (Super 8, 1977) – anamorphic also available

By 1980, the *Star Wars* license had been profitable for Ken Films, so the natural outgrowth of that success was to release selected scenes of *The Empire Strikes Back* on Super 8, though this time with a more modest three products. The shortest of the TESB reels (F-63) was a 200 ft., 8 min. set of selected scenes. Oddly, while the reel did feature a magnetic stripe that could have held the reel's sound, the U.S. release instead included an audiocassette (advertised as “free” via a sticker on the box cover) that could

was originally, so that it could fit onto a medium that wasn't originally wide enough to hold the image. A special lens or processing was then required to return the image to its proper dimensions. Widescreen DVDs were typically anamorphic widescreen.

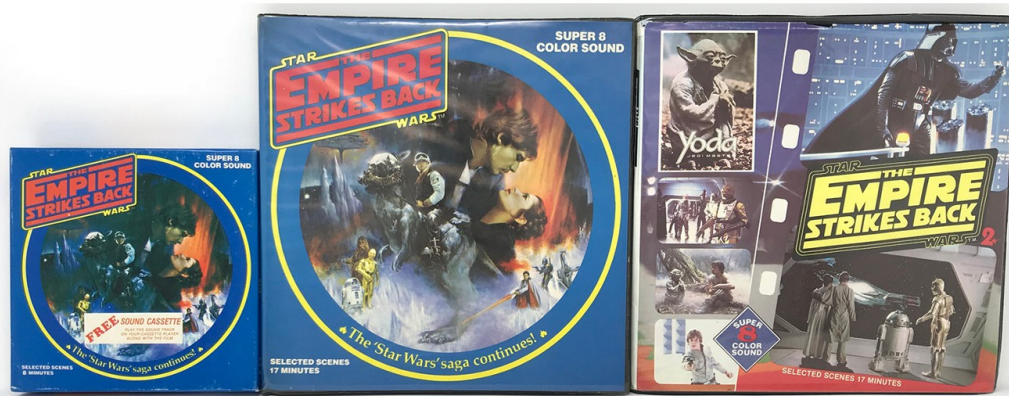
be played while viewing the reel. This release came in a blue box with art from Roger Kastel's style A film poster, reminiscent of *Gone with the Wind*, within concentric blue and yellow circles.



TESB 200 ft. reel with cassette (Super 8, 1980)

Two larger, 400 ft. reels (another F-63 with similar packaging to the smaller reel and F-65 with a markedly different look) presented selected scenes that cut the film down to the bare essentials. (Again, though, watching the reels back-to-back would have presented scenes out of order.) The F-65 reel's packaging included several images from the film and promotional stills on either side of the front cover. Images of Yoda, the bounty hunters, Luke with Yoda, and Luke on Cloud City ran down the left side. A shot of Darth Vader imploring an unseen Luke and the closing shot of Luke, Leia, and the droids appeared on the right side with the film's logo in between.

It would be easy to dismiss these Super 8 forays into the home viewing market, since they were not full-length *Star Wars* films, but to fans whose only options at the time were film reels or praying for another theatrical re-release, the ability to watch scenes from the saga in the comfort of their own homes was a prize worthy of Boba Fett.



TESB reels (Super 8, 1980) –
Left to right: 200 ft.; 400 ft. #1; 400 ft. #2

A Brief Note on 16 mm Film (1977 – 1983)

Before leaving the idea of film reels, I would be remiss if I did not also mention the concept of 16 mm reels. All three *Original Trilogy* films, their early behind-the-scenes specials, and more found their way to 16 mm, but these reels were *not* for sale at the time for home viewing. Reels printed on 16 mm film tended to be the domain of libraries, military bases, prisons, and other locations in which large numbers of viewers might watch the content via projector. This was indeed a way to watch *Star Wars* films outside of theaters before full versions of the films arrived on home video, but these were not meant to be purchased by regular consumers, which puts the format somewhat outside the purview of this book.



Top: *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* (one 16 mm reel, 1977)

Bottom: *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back* (two 16 mm reels, 1980)

That said, some 16 mm copies of the films and related material have made their way onto the secondary market over the years as the original institutions that owned them disposed of unwanted stock. Fans trying to collect them, especially the full-length *Star Wars* films, can expect to pay thousands for a single copy.¹⁹ 16 mm is an odd niche within *Star Wars*

¹⁹ In Jan. 2017, a full-length 16 mm print of ROTJ sold on eBay for about \$4,000. I was fortunate around the same time to have fellow collector Paul Landis donate *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2*, *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back*,

collecting, albeit a rather expensive one and not exactly “home video” as we usually define it.

Crank That *Star Wars* Movie Viewer! (1977)

While we generally view the Super 8 reels as the beginning of *Star Wars* home viewing, they were released around the same time as another *Star Wars* film reel product that is often overlooked. In 1975, Kenner had launched its Movie Viewer product line. The Viewer itself was a hand-cranked film viewer. A child would look through a lens at one end, then turn a crank on the side that advanced 8 mm film inside a plastic cassette “brick.” During its lifespan (1975 – 1979), the Movie Viewer was marketed with various licensed properties like *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Snoopy*. In 1977, Kenner added a *Star Wars* sticker to the Movie Viewer and marketed it as the *Star Wars* Movie Viewer, featuring “exciting *Star Wars* action movies” on five Movie Cassettes (billed as “color shows”) that each included about 60 seconds²⁰ of *Star Wars* footage without sound.

The *Star Wars* Movie Viewer came with the first of the cassettes, *May the Force Be With You*. Four other cassettes were sold separately: *Danger at the Cantina*, *Battle in Hyperspace*, *Assault on Death Star*, and *Destroy Death Star*.²¹

All told, these cassettes only provided about 5 min. of *Star Wars* visuals for young audiences, even less than the shortest of the Ken Films reels, but that mattered little to kids who were thrilled to see even tiny snippets of the movie in their own hands.²²

and *Classic Creatures: Return of the Jedi* on 16 mm to my collection. Given the price of the films on 16 mm when available at all, I doubt I will manage to acquire them myself. The price of a full trilogy could easily buy a car or put a down payment on a larger house than our own.

²⁰ I swear, though, that if you crank fast enough, you can get through one in less than half that time... and probably destroy the film in the process, since these are almost 45 years old now.

²¹ Of course, there were no battles in hyperspace in ANH. It must have just sounded exciting. And, yes, the latter two titles were both missing “the,” which made them sound a bit like bad English translations of foreign films.

²² Who needed recorded audio? We’d make our own lightsaber sounds! *Shoom*. *Shoom*.



Star Wars Movie Viewer (1977) – Left: Movie Viewer
Center (top to bottom): cassette packaging;
Danger at the Cantina; *Destroy Death Star*
Right (top to bottom): *Assault on Death Star*;
May the Force Be With You; and *Battle in Hyperspace*

Meanwhile in Italy (1977)

A common point of confusion for American collectors has been an ongoing urban legend that Kenner also produced a *Star Wars* film projector for kids that allowed moving pictures to be shown to more than just one fan at a time (as in the case of the Movie Viewer).

The source of this myth was likely the fact that such products did exist globally, just not in the United States. In Italy, for example, Harbert (Kenner's Italian licensee for *Star Wars* products) produced tiny *Star Wars* (or *Guerre Stellari*) film reels for the Minicinex projector. The Minicinex operated on three D batteries to shine light from a very small bulb through a lens that allowed images to be projected (in questionable quality) onto screens, walls, etc. To create a moving image, the child operating the Minicinex would turn a crank, similar to that on the Movie Viewer, to advance the film. Unlike the Movie Viewer, which kept its film safely ensconced within plastic “bricks,” film reels for the Minicinex were simply film wrapped around a plastic cylinder, which was then clipped into the projector. Children (or parents) needed to *very* carefully position the film near, around, and between the various parts of the projector for playback.²³

²³ Perhaps Italian kids were more patient than American children.

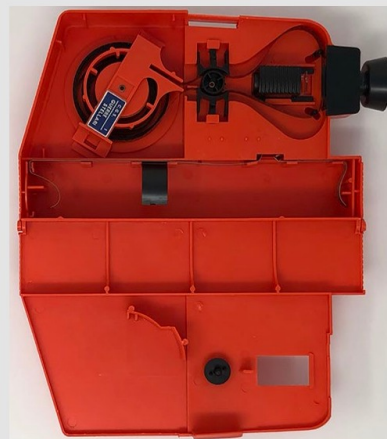


Guerre Stellari: Che la Forza sia con voi (Italy, 1977) –
The title translated as *Star Wars: May the Force Be with You*.

The actual order of events on a particular film reel was mostly nonsensical. For the package I own (an orange Minicinetix that came boxed with a *Star Wars* reel), the approx. 1 min. of footage included heavily-edited footage of (in this order) the Death Star detention block battle, the boarding of the *Tantive IV*, Luke and Leia fleeing stormtroopers on the Death Star (including the rope swing), the *Millennium Falcon* engaging TIE fighters, the opening attack of the *Devastator* on the *Tantive IV*, and more of the *Falcon* vs. TIEs battle (making it seem as if the attack on the *Tantive IV* was part of that battle). The reel ended just as the last TIE fighter was destroyed during the escape from the Death Star.



Minicinetix (closed)



Minicinetix (open with film inside)

In America, we did not have a comparable *Star Wars* product to the Minicinetix. However, many fans have confused Kenner's American *Star Wars Give-a-Show Projector* with the Minicinetix product line. Unfortunately,

the *Give-a-Show*, while a nifty little *Star Wars* product in its own right, was *not* a film projector. It was a *slide* projector, allowing only static images to be projected, rather than any kind of moving pictures. As such, it is not considered a *Star Wars* home video item, even as we expand (and strain) the definition to mean “home viewing.” We have to draw the line somewhere.



Star Wars Give-a-Show Projector (1979) – This was just a slide projector, not a film projector. This product, along with the existence of the Minicinex in other regions, probably led to the urban legend of an American kids’ film projector.

Conclusion: Better Than Nothing

By the mid-1980s, Super 8 had given way to VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, and the already-dying CED. Fortunately, while film enthusiasts today can be nostalgic for Super 8’s glory days, each of those four growing formats would allow something Super 8 simply could not in the form of full-length *Star Wars* films at home. Still, one has to give credit where due to both Ken Films and Kenner. In a time when watching all of a *Star Wars* film at home was not an option, both companies managed to bring small chunks of the galaxy far, far away into our homes, which was something about which fans of most other films could only dream.

2 THE GREAT FORMAT WAR

(1982 – 1994)²⁴

By 1982, the home video market was steadily growing, but owning films was not yet the norm for most households. Even those homes that did have players tended to rely more on movie rentals at specialized stores than on retail purchases of films. That was beginning to change, however, and *Star Wars* would help propel the idea of video ownership, despite challenges from organizations like the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), whose president, Jack Valenti, spoke out against the supposedly devastating effect that home video would have on the movie industry.

Lifetime Rentals? (1982)

Five years and two days after its theatrical premiere, *A New Hope* arrived on home video in the form of a rental-only, full screen (pan and scan)²⁵ VHS and Beta release on May 27, 1982. These cassettes, made available to rental outlets, were not meant to be sold to consumers. The clamshell cases,

²⁴ This chapter does *not* begin coverage of the THX remastered films that began in 1993 with the *Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set. That kicks off the next chapter, *The Original... One Last Time*. This chapter does, however, include some important reissues of a 1992 product in 1993 – 1994 that fixed a major problem, hence the overlapping dates of this chapter and the next.

²⁵ Widescreen *Star Wars* releases would not arrive in the U.S. until 1989, and even then they would be based on Japanese releases that did not arrive until 1986.

adorned with what we now think of as the film's classic style A Tom Jung poster artwork, prominently featured the 20th Century-Fox Video logo, the *Star Wars* title (with the subtitle nowhere to be found on this era's packaging), and a label at the bottom that proclaimed the cassette as part of the "Video Rental Library." The rear of the cases included a note that both cassette and case were officially the property of 20th Century-Fox and that no typical rights of ownership (selling, bartering, etc.) were conferred by a mere rental. (A similar warning could be found on the cassette labels.) Cassettes and cases were even able to be matched by a serial number on the back of the packaging that was identical to another on the tape-protecting cover (flap) on the cassette. The cassettes themselves could be identified by dark blue labels on face and spine with red lettering and the 20th Century-Fox Video logo. The colors of the cassette and its flap often did not match.

With a retail release of the film still months away, fans desperate to make *A New Hope* a centerpiece of their collection would often secure unofficial "lifetime rentals" from video stores, paying \$120²⁶ or more (a 50% markup compared to the retail release later that year) in order to check out a cassette and never have to return it.



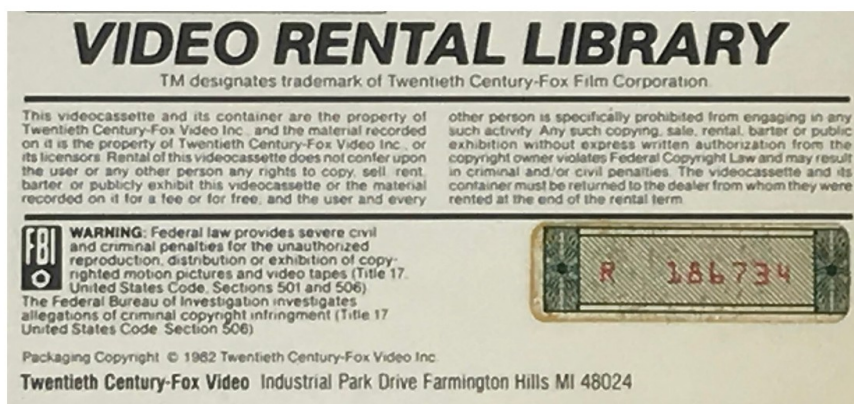
ANH (1982) Video Rental Library release: VHS (left) and Beta (right)

²⁶ That's about \$320 in 2020 dollars, making this "lifetime rental" a little more costly than purchasing one of Blufans' elaborate Chinese *Star Wars* One Click sets via eBay in the Disney era.

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



VHS serial number (cassette location)



VHS case serial number and purpose notice



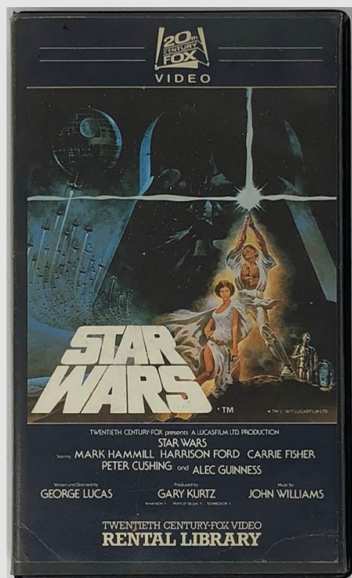
Back comparison: VHS (left) vs. Beta (right) – Note the serial number locations.



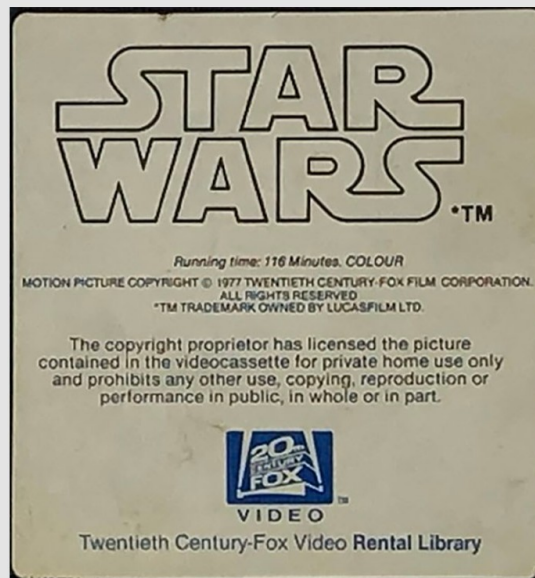
VHS label – Notice the large, middle section of text, which detailed rental terms

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1982)

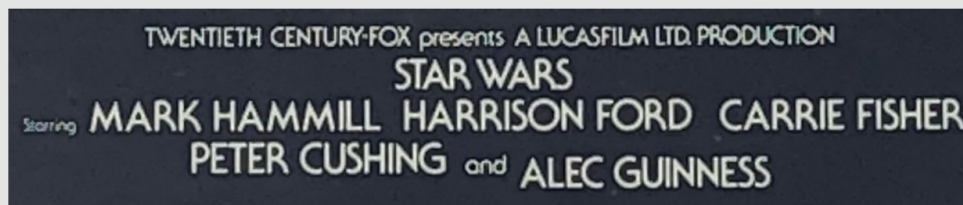
In the United Kingdom, ANH also arrived on home video for rental only, under the banner of the “Twentieth Century-Fox Video Rental Library.” Unlike the U.S. release, the UK version’s clamshell case (again using Tom Jung’s style A poster art) bore three spelling errors that make this an amusing release in retrospect. First, Mark Hamill gained an extra “M” as “Mark Hammill” on the case front, then Han Solo became a bit more German as “Hans Solo” on the back. A final, minor error was the lack of a hyphen in “R2-D2,” which was written as “R2D2.”



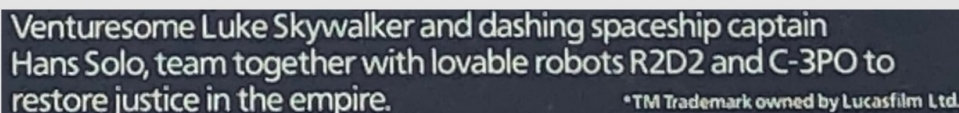
ANH Twentieth Century-Fox
Video Rental Library release
(UK Beta, 1982)



Label



Front error: "Hammill" instead of "Hamill"



Back errors: "Hans" instead of "Han" and "R2D2" instead of "R2-D2"

Since we will be seeing quite a few releases from the United Kingdom (and other regions), now is good time to address two important distinctions to keep in mind when we look at UK releases. First, let's consider regional video format standards in the era of standard definition (SD) video, prior to the emergence of high definition (HD) and ultra high definition (UHD) home media products.

During the standard definition age (if you'll permit me a bit of a dramatic term here), video products were released in three different formats, depending on region.

NTSC²⁷ was the standard used in America, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and some other countries in Latin America and East Asia. Programs were presented at 30 frames per second with 525 scan lines delivered and 480 visible to the viewer.

The most common alternative to NTSC was PAL²⁸ (25 frames per second, 625 scan lines with 576 visible). This was the format used in the United Kingdom, several other European countries, Oceania, China, India, the Middle East, some parts of South America, and the majority of Africa.

A third, less well-known standard was SECAM²⁹, which mirrored the

²⁷ NTSC stands for "National Television System Committee," the body handling video standards for the United States, Japan, South Korea, and several other parts of the world.

²⁸ PAL stands for "phase alternating line."

²⁹ SECAM stands for the French phrase "Séquentiel couleur à mémoire," which translates as "Sequential Color with/and Memory."

frame rate and scan lines of PAL but processed color information differently. This standard was most often found in France, sometimes China (when not PAL), and much of what at this time was thought of as the Eastern Bloc countries (Russia, Eastern Europe, etc.).

In this period, one could find home video releases in each of the three formats, depending on region, though that would narrow down to just NTSC and PAL by the time of DVD, so that SECAM regions would use PAL DVDs. The key here is simple: these formats were incompatible. If you wanted to play an American VHS cassette, you needed an NTSC player. If you wanted to play one from the UK, you needed a PAL player. If you wanted to be able to play items from multiple regions, you would need a multi-region player.

One odd consequence of these different standards was a phenomenon referred to as “PAL speedup.” Most films were shot using a framerate of 24 frames per second (fps). To meet NTSC standards, content would need to be converted to 30 fps, a process that retained the speed of the original film. However, with PAL being 25 fps, the difference between PAL’s framerate and the original film was only 1 fps. Rather than using a complicated conversion process, the solution was typically to just speed up the original film from 24 to 25 fps to compensate. As a result, films shot in 24 fps and then released in PAL format tended to run approximately 4% faster than the original source, leading to shorter runtimes and, due to audio speed also increasing to match the visuals, a slightly higher-pitched audio track.³⁰

Even today, we are still affected by the lingering legacy of this era of multiple formats. Even though HD and UHD formats use standardized resolutions, the recording standards for home media still adhere to the NTSC and PAL frame rates. It’s just that modern televisions and projectors are able to handle multiple possible frame rates, so it typically doesn’t matter as much anymore.

In the 1970s – 1990s, as we explore home video releases, note that knowing whether a product was NTSC, PAL, or SECAM mattered. Whenever I address a standard definition product (i.e. when it would matter) that is *not* NTSC, I will call that out. This will eventually become

³⁰ The result of PAL speedup might resemble time compression for LaserDisc or CED (a phenomenon we will see soon), but it was *not* the same. Time compression retained a film’s proper framerate and audio pitch for that medium, whereas PAL speedup did not.

much easier as we enter the era of DVD and then later formats, since region coding will eventually address these issues with easily-identified alphanumerical labels (e.g. American DVDs as part of Region 1, American Blu-rays as part of Region A, etc.).

The second distinction we should consider is distribution methods. In the United States, we tend to think of home video releases in this “Great Format War” era (as I call it) as coming in three forms: rental; retail; and mail-away. “Rental” releases would not be available for sale when specifically designated as such, though some would be illegally sold (as in the case of the 1982 Video Rental Library ANH VHS release).³¹ “Retail” releases, meanwhile, were meant for consumer purchase and widely available in stores.³² “Mail-away” releases were what one would expect: something available only by mail.³³

In the United Kingdom during this era, the division was more like rental, specialty/mail-away, and sell-through, with *both* of the latter sometimes being conflated into a single “retail” category. First, there were items produced for rental that were meant to be rental-only, such as the 1982 ANH release that began this sidebar. That made them similar to the American “rental” category.

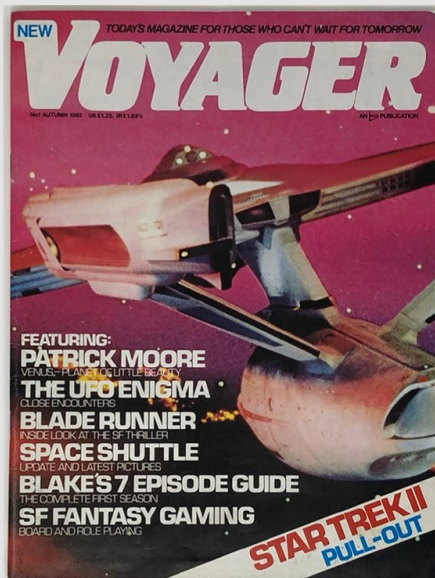
Second, one would sometimes see an item produced ostensibly for rental (often recognizable by lacking a barcode) that was available for purchase through either a small number of specialty shops or by mail-order. For example, in late 1982, fans could purchase cassettes of ANH by mail as a promotion for the first issue (at least) of *New Voyager* magazine. (I’m led to believe that a similar CBS/Fox Video release in 1983 also went to

³¹ Eventually it would become the norm for rental outlets to purchase large amounts of a popular new release at launch to make sure plenty were available, then later cut back on that inventory by selling off excess copies. These sold copies were typically referred to in the U.S. as “former rental” copies, still distinguishing them from their retail counterparts.

³² Store exclusives wouldn’t become the norm until around the turn of the millennium.

³³ One could often purchase retail versions of releases through the mail, but this category was specifically for items *only* available through mail-away promotions, such as the 1995 version of *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* through a cereal promotion.

specialty shops, not just mail-order.) These copies had no barcode and were not widely available. Some in the UK would consider this to be the first “retail” release, since it was available for purchase without the “lifetime rental” workaround, but since an average person couldn’t just walk into a store and purchase the cassettes, others argue that this was more like an American “mail-away” item, rather than “retail” (which was often defined by wide availability).



New Voyager, issue 1, Autumn 1982 – Included direct ordering ANH offer



Page featuring offer for ANH on VHS, Beta, or Video 2000

Finally, as the 1980s continued, the UK saw a rise in “sell-through” releases, which were more equivalent to what Americans consider standard retail products. Sell-through items were widely available, requiring neither a specialty shop nor a mail-away offer to acquire them. The first VHS copies of ANH available in this form came in 1987 under the banner of *The All Time Great Movies*.³⁴ Those who consider the 1982 mail-away as non-retail tend to credit this release as the first retail version of ANH in the UK.

So, which should be considered the first retail release of ANH in the UK: the mail-order version in 1982 (and any specialty shop copies around that time) or the one in 1987 that was widely available in stores? In truth, it’s not really that simple. Nuance matters, especially when we are looking at a region that isn’t our own. In essence, they are *both* firsts: the first (1982)

³⁴ We will see this release in another sidebar later this chapter.

that could be acquired legally, albeit through rather limited means, and the first (1987) to be widely available to customers.

The issue only gets more convoluted from there, as we begin to widen our scope to other formats and proceed further into the 1980s, so I've made a judgment call of sorts when it comes to this guide. In general, when UK releases from this era are discussed, I will refrain from addressing the means of acquiring those items unless it is crucial to the context of that release, as in the case of the initial rental release covered at the beginning of this sidebar or the first sell-through VHS release in 1987. It's just simpler that way, and I believe that delving into the nuances of the UK market would warrant an entire guide to such releases, one I do not feel that I am qualified to write.

As if that wasn't enough, we should also keep in mind that the UK secondary market typically refers to home video releases prior to the passage of the Video Recordings Act in 1984 and subsequent Video Recordings (Labeling) Act in 1985 as "pre-cert." The former required all such recordings to bear ratings, based on certification by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Ratings were also given a colorful visual overhaul (and one new rating, "Uc" for small children). The follow-up law dictated how that information would need to be included on packaging. Thus, "pre-cert" films either did not show a rating or often used the less colorful, often black and white, pre-1984 rating symbols that were not as visually prominent on packaging. (Content was also less regulated, though that has little bearing on *Star Wars* releases.)

The First LaserDisc and CED Retail Releases (1982)

Many explorations into *Star Wars* on home video skip straight from the Video Rental Library release to the original VHS and Beta retail copies that hit stores in Sept. 1982. Doing so, though, is to skip over a pair of releases that beat VHS and Beta to the retail punch.³⁵

In June 1982, *A New Hope* premiered on LaserDisc, retailing for approximately \$35.³⁶ 20th Century-Fox Video's initial release of *A New Hope*

³⁵ This is only when speaking in terms of full versions of *Star Wars* films. The behind-the-scenes special *The Making of Star Wars as Told By C-3PO and R2-D2* was actually the first release of a *Star Wars* product on VHS and Beta in 1979. See the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III* for details.

³⁶ That's a bit over \$90 in 2020 dollars.

on LaserDisc was on one double-sided “extended play” or “CLV” (Constant Linear Velocity) disc. CLV discs changed rotation speed, slowing as content moved along, which allowed each side of a disc to carry one full hour of material. Since most films were over an hour in length, they typically required flipping the LaserDisc over partway through the movie or a player that automatically switched sides (without flipping the disc).

With *A New Hope* clocking in at 121 min., a change was necessary to fit the film onto a single disc. Thus, the film was time compressed. This was done by adjusting the “pull down” process that converted the 24 frames per second (fps) film source into a 30 fps (or 29.97 fps to be more precise) interlaced transfer for home video. Every so often, the “3:2 pull down” process was altered to produce less frames in the final home video content than normal, effectively speeding up the film a tiny bit, rather than cutting noticeable chunks of content.³⁷ This allowed the film to be split approximately in half to fit on a single disc with two sides.



ANH (LaserDisc, 1982)



Disc label

For this initial ANH LaserDisc release, artwork used the same Tom Jung style A poster art as the rental VHS and Beta releases. The disc label

³⁷ It's *really* technical, but basically we didn't “lose” frames from the original source, but we “lost” frames from the converted result in order to speed things up. This was different than how the PAL format simply increased the framerate for home video by 1 fps. Both had the result of speeding up the film by a few percent, but this form of time compression did not result in the same degree of audio pitch issues as PAL speedup.

was a standard 20th Century-Fox Video label with the company logo at the top and a mixture of red and white text, all against a dark blue background.

Just two months later, Aug. 1982 brought the first release of *A New Hope* on Capacitance Electronic Disc (CED), also for around \$35. Like a LaserDisc, the diameter of a CED was 30 cm (approx. 11.8 in.), but the actual material was different. Rather than being an optical disc medium read by a laser like a LaserDisc, a CED worked more like a vinyl record. Content was stored via grooves in a special vinyl surface that were read by a diamond stylus (similar to how a needle would read a vinyl record for audio content). In order to protect the discs (or “platters”), they were placed within plastic frames called “spines” that were stored inside “caddies” that resembled much heavier and larger versions of 3.5 in. computer disks.³⁸ The caddy was inserted into a player, then removed, leaving the plastic spine and platter behind in the player. After play, the process was reversed for removal. Caddies could be found commonly in blue or white, which was often used to distinguish stereo from mono releases, respectively. For ANH, the caddy artwork was again the Tom Jung style A poster art, arranged similarly to the LaserDisc release.



ANH (CED, 1982) –
20th Century-Fox Video version



CED platter in spine outside of caddy

As with CLV LaserDiscs, each side of a CED could hold approximately one hour of video, necessitating time compression for this single-disc

³⁸ Yes, that's the type of disk that became the ubiquitous “save” icon.

release.



Top of CED caddy with platter (in spine) inserted (i.e. “closed”)



CED platter in spine emerging from top of caddy



Top of CED caddy with platter (and spine) removed (i.e. “open/empty”)

Forever Tinkering:

Time Compression (1982 – 1992)

These days, we are so used to home video media having enough space to fit entire films that we find the idea of having to change sides, discs, or even VHS cassettes (as in the case of longer films like James Cameron’s *Titanic*) rather weird. For LaserDisc and CED, this was the norm, so the key question here is whether time compressing the films, rather than just having to swap sides of a disc/platter, actually had a detrimental effect on viewing them at the time.

Frankly, most viewers would likely never have noticed without being told that the films had been converted in this way. Today, we tend to think of this as sacrilege, but few at the time really noticed or cared much for the difference, as long as they could (affordably) view the films on their preferred media format.

The First VHS and Beta Retail Release (1982)

Sept. 1, 1982, finally saw the release of retail copies of *A New Hope* on VHS and Beta, each selling for around \$80.³⁹ Like their Video Rental Library counterparts and their disc-based cousins on LaserDisc and CED, these were no-frills releases with no trailers or bonus content of any kind, just the film itself.



ANH (1982): VHS (left) and Beta (right)

These initial releases were packaged in what were referred to as “drawer boxes” or “drawer cases,” cardboard cassette cases that did not load from the bottom as later became the norm for retail releases, nor did they simply load the cassette from the side by itself.⁴⁰ Instead, a drawer case featured a slipcover over a cardboard “drawer” that fit inside. The actual cassette would then be stored in a recessed area within the drawer, but those recessed areas did not take up the entire width of the drawer. As such, these

³⁹ By contrast, a CED or LaserDisc would cost less than half the price of a VHS or Beta copy. I’d also note that while \$80 seems high for a single film home video release to us today, it was even worse back then. If we adjust for inflation and convert \$80 into 2020 dollars, it’s more like a bit over \$210! That’s a pretty expensive release in modern terms, even if it’s a *Star Wars* movie.

⁴⁰ The eventual norm for blank cassettes that could be recorded upon was to have cases that loaded from the side, rather than the bottom.

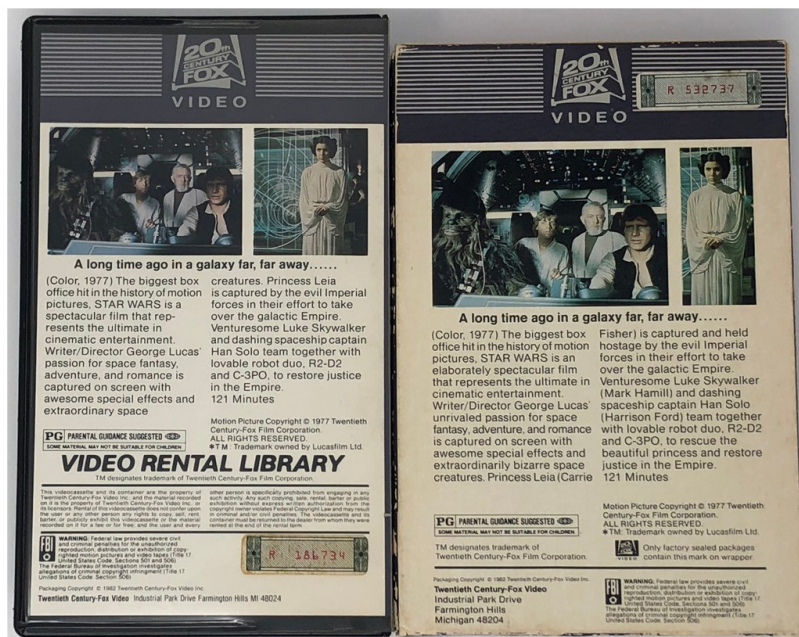
drawer cases were about an inch wider than what we now consider a “standard” VHS or Beta case. The drawers themselves featured a small colored area on the spine (a red area labeled “VHS” or a blue area labeled “BETA”) that would show through a hole cut in the spine and front edge of the outer case, allowing both formats to use the same outer slipcover (using Tom Jung’s style A poster art like its contemporaries), while still being readily identifiable due to the drawer’s marking being visible through the spine cutout. (I would note that some drawers did not include the format notation on the front, so sometimes the format showed through the front but other times just through the spine. It would seem to depend on when that drawer was manufactured.)



VHS drawer box/case – slipcover (left) and drawer (right)

The cassettes themselves were virtually identical to those from the rental release (with the exception of the rental-oriented notice being removed), and copies can still be found today that still bear matching serial number stickers on the cassette and back of the package, shifted from the rental version’s bottom right to the top right for retail. These releases were most readily identifiable by their unusual width and the 20th Century-Fox Video logo at the top. They also did not bear any form of colored stripe or triangle at the bottom right of the cover, instead displaying “Stereo (Mono Compatible)” in simple, white lettering in that area.

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



Serial number location comparison: rental (left) vs. retail (right)



1982 VHS label comparison: rental (left) vs. retail (right) – Notice that the middle section of legal text was far less copious for retail than for rental.



1982 Beta label comparison: rental (left) vs. retail (right) – Notice that the middle section of legal text was far less copious for retail than for rental.

From 20th Century-Fox Video to CBS/Fox Video (1982 – 1983)

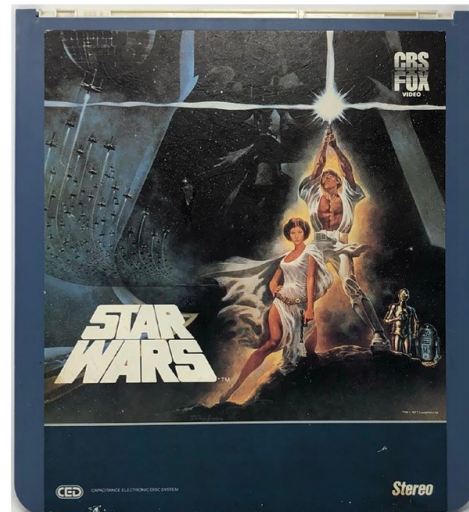
20th Century-Fox Video merged with CBS Video Enterprises during the course of 1982 to become CBS/Fox Video. Thus, when late 1982 and 1983 brought a wave of reissued copies of *A New Hope* on CED, LaserDisc, Beta, and VHS, minor branding changes were made.

CEDs and LaserDiscs were reissued (later in 1982 and in 1983, respectively) to carry the new CBS/Fox Video branding. Cover art remained the same, while elements around it were altered. The upper portion of the cases were redesigned to drop the wide area that had housed the 20th Century-Fox Video logo. Instead, the artwork was allowed to stretch all the way up, and a simple CBS/Fox Video logo was added to the top right corner. Interestingly, the lower region of the original CED caddy featured the CED logo, a 20th Century Fox logo, and “Stereo,” but the reissue dropped the 20th Century Fox logo without any replacement, whereas the 1982 LaserDisc cover featured the LaserVision logo, “Laser Videodisc,” the 20th Century Fox Logo, and “Stereo Extended Play” but *kept* the 20th Century Fox logo on the 1983 release, despite the merger stripping that branding from most contemporary *Star Wars* home video covers. The LaserDisc swapped the 20th Century-Fox Video logo for CBS/Fox Video on its label, while both swapped the logos on their jacket or caddy back.

A second version of the CBS/Fox Video ANH CED was released in 1983. It typically included a blue caddy with a white spine, meaning that the colors didn’t match when the CED was “closed.” This was odd, given that stereo releases tended to be in blue caddies, while white typically signified mono. This mismatch appears to have been some kind of manufacturing issue, as we will soon see with TESB in 1984. Starting with this CED reissue, the label covered the full bottom of the caddy, which lacked the small indentation in the earlier releases that had acted as a handle when inserting the caddy into (or extracting it from) a CED player.



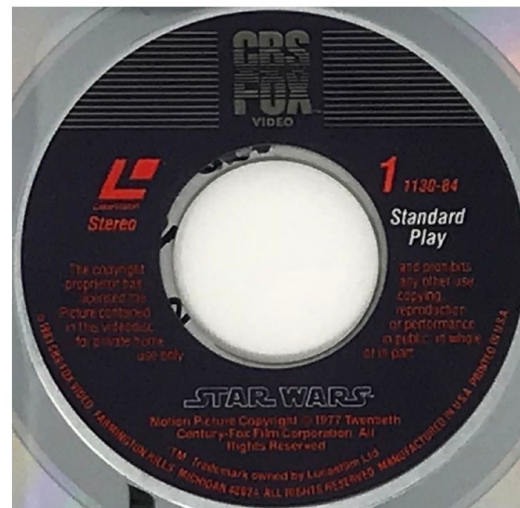
ANH (CED, 1982) –
CBS/Fox Video version



ANH (CED, 1983)



ANH (LaserDisc, 1983)



Disc label

On VHS and Beta, cassettes and their labels remained mostly the same as the 1982 retail release, aside from finally ditching serial number stickers and some (but not all) copies bearing an updated label that was identical to the original except for swapping out the 20th Century-Fox Video logo for a CBS/Fox Video emblem.⁴¹ The packages remained drawer cases, but the angled hole from 1982 that allowed the VHS or Beta label to stand out was

⁴¹ It was not uncommon in this era to see new packaging arrive before new labels, leading to some old stock with old labels sold in updated packaging. It could also happen the other way around, but that does not seem to have been as prevalent.

replaced by a single hole in the spine and a (rather useless) smaller hole on the bottom. Both lost the wide 20th Century-Fox Video branding at the top to allow more artwork with a less intrusive CBS/Fox Video logo in the top right corner, similar to the changes to the top quarter of CED and LaserDisc packaging. (The company logo was also switched out on the spine.)

In the lower portion of the front cover art, above where cast and crew information was displayed, the white “Stereo (Mono Compatible)” message was removed. For VHS, that note was moved upward into a diagonal red stripe at the bottom right of the case artwork. Since the same outer shells were once again used for both VHS and Beta, that red stripe (or “ribbon,” as some call it) was covered with a blue triangular sticker on Beta copies that read “BETA” to help consumers distinguish between formats.



ANH (1983) VHS (left) and Beta (right)



VHS label – Notice the slight reworking, including the CBS/Fox Video logo.

This would not be the last time that *Star Wars* home video consumers would see identical content re-released in redesigned packaging.

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1982)

In the United Kingdom, fans could view ANH on a format that did not exist on the American market. In 1979, Phillips and Grundig launched a new videocassette format that was designed to compete with the VHS and Beta formats developed by JVC and Sony, respectively. Phillips called this new format the “Video Compact Cassette” (VCC), a name that can be found on many cassettes. However, the name they trademarked for the format was “Video 2000” (often shortened to “V2000”). Over time, the trademarked name has been the one that has stuck for collectors.

In 1982, ANH became the first *Star Wars* film release on Video 2000, available through special order similar to VHS and Beta.⁴² For these first consumer releases, the spelling of Mark Hamill’s name was correct on the front, but not the names of Han Solo and R2-D2, which remained “Hans Solo” and “R2D2” on the back. (A second Video 2000 version of ANH came through CBS/Fox Video in 1983 with updated packaging.)



ANH (UK Video 2000, 1982)



Cassette

This new format was designed specifically for PAL (though also used to

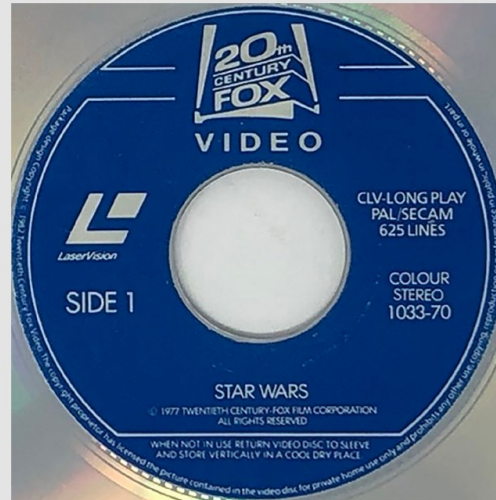
⁴² The behind-the-scenes special *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* was also released on Video 2000 in 1982. See the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III*.

a smaller degree for SECAM) and was sold in Europe, South Africa, and Argentina. Video 2000 cassettes measured 7.2 in. x 4.35 in., narrower but taller than VHS cassettes (7.33 in. x 4 in.) The format never managed to overcome its competition and was eventually discontinued in 1988.

Meanwhile, the UK also saw a release of ANH on LaserDisc, a format that would not catch on nearly as widely in the UK as in the U.S. (which itself paled in comparison to Japan). Whereas initial releases of the rest of the *Original Trilogy* would require a local UK distributor, ANH was released in the United Kingdom through standard 20th Century-Fox Video distribution. The disc jacket used the same artwork as the cassette formats but with an absolutely ridiculous amount of dead space (just the background color) around the central artwork. The area above the art included a rather wide (but not full width) 20th Century-Fox Video logo bar, while the area beneath the art included cast/crew information (with “Hamill” spelled correctly, as on other non-rental releases), the LaserVision logo, and format details. The areas to the right and left of the art, however, were simply barren. The back of the jacket repeated the “Hans Solo” and “R2D2” errors of other releases. The label included expected logos and text over a solid blue background.



ANH (UK LaserDisc, 1982)



Disc label

This was a single CLV extended play disc (called “long play” on the jacket). Due to PAL speedup, the film was already short enough to fit on a single disc at 112 min., so time compression (in the NTSC sense) was not an issue as it was in America.

Meanwhile in Japan (1983)

Beginning with 1983’s CBS/Fox Video reissue of ANH and continuing

through *Caravan of Courage* in 1987, CBS/Fox Video produced five⁴³ *Star Wars* products for Japan in a format that never reached the U.S., known as VHD. While the acronym today stands for Virtual Hard Disk and is a computing term, the VHD acronym of the 1980s referred to Video High Density discs, a home video format that was launched in Japan in 1983 and died a quick and ignominious death, considered mostly defunct by 1986. (Discs would continue to be produced in much smaller runs until the first half of the 1990s, however.)

VHD most closely resembled the CED in the U.S. Its vinyl discs were read by a player's stylus, though a VHD did not have grooves like an LP or CED. They were read electronically, similar to how compact discs (CDs) were authored. Individual discs (9.8 in. in diameter as compared to CED's 11.8 in.) were kept in caddies when not in use, though the smaller disc size allowed for smaller caddies (10.5 in. x 13.25 in. for VHD as compared to 12.75 in. x 14 in. for CED). Also like CED, a single VHD could hold approximately one hour of content on each side.

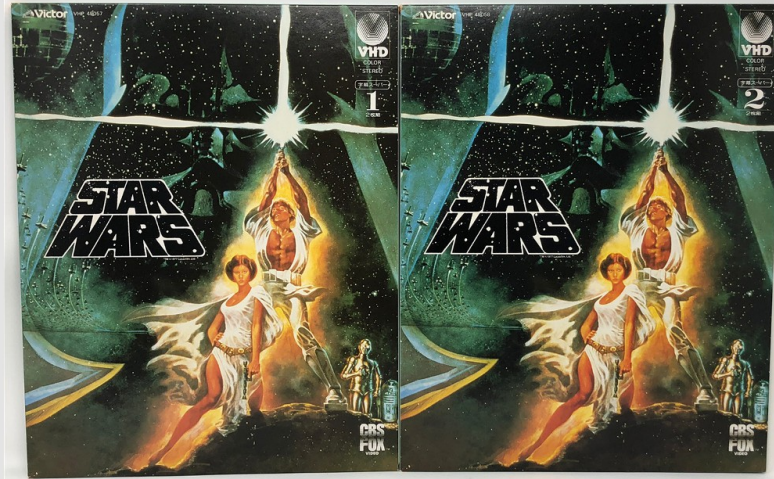


Size comparison: CED (left) vs. VHD (right)

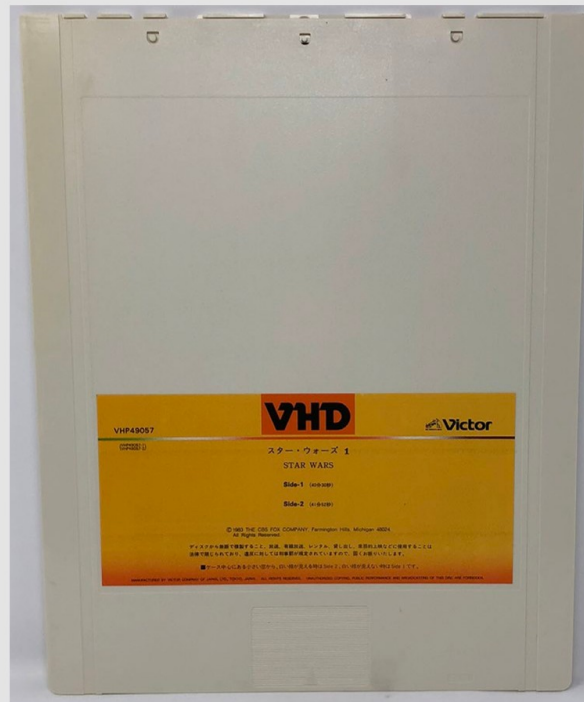
The first of the Japanese *Star Wars* VHD releases came in 1983 with ANH. The film was not time-compressed, thereby necessitating two discs, which meant two caddies, which resembled slightly narrow 3.5 in. computer disks. Each caddy came with an individual cardboard slipcover with artwork similar to the early American releases (i.e. Tom Jung's style A poster art, yet

⁴³ The VHD release of *Caravan of Courage* will be addressed in the chapter *Teddy Bears, Towanis, and Trouble Again*, while the double-feature release of *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* with *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back* will be addressed in the chapter *Behind the Curtain*. Both chapters are found in *Volume III*.

rather zoomed in for these slipcovers). A paper insert was also included, which used the same artwork in grayscale. The VHD caddies themselves did not bear any artwork, just a rather boring, orange label on each.



ANH (Japanese VHD, 1983) – two VHD caddies, each with its own slipcover



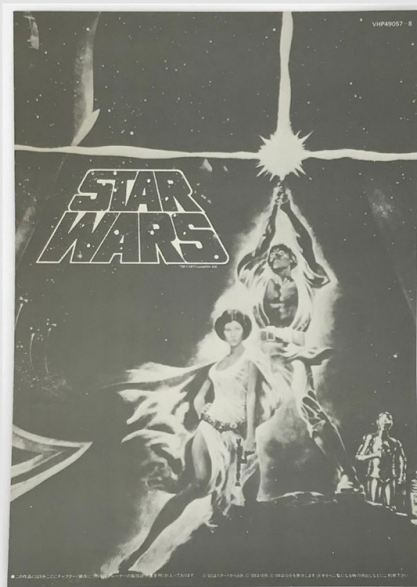
Caddy (only one fit into each separate slipcover)



Caddy label



Top of VHD caddy with disc (and end-cover) removed (i.e. “open/empty”)



Insert



VHD with end-cover (outside of caddy)

VHD faced stiff competition in the Format War and was one of its oft-forgotten casualties, despite briefly branching out from Japan into the United Kingdom and even having a stereoscopic 3D⁴⁴ player available (in

⁴⁴ More on stereoscopic 3D when we enter the era of *Star Wars* Blu-ray 3D releases in the chapter *Enter: Disney in Volume II*.

an era when very little home video content was produced in 3D).

The First Red Triangles (1984)

For collectors of *Star Wars* films on VHS and Beta, the next few releases are often confusing and a source of frustration when trying to find them all decades later. This is due in part to packaging that was either identical or nearly so and content that varied only slightly. The phenomenon began in 1984, the same year that ANH saw its first television airing on CBS (Feb. 26, 1984).

1984 was most noteworthy as the year when *The Empire Strikes Back* finally saw its first home video releases on Nov. 13, four years after arriving in theaters on May 21, 1980. As with ANH, the film was released on all four media in the current format war. Once again, the CED and LaserDisc (CLV extended play) releases were time compressed due to the film running 124 min. on media that could only hold 60 min. per side. A standard, non-compressed version could be found on both VHS and Beta.



TESB (CED, 1984)



TESB
(VHS/Beta, 1984)



TESB (LaserDisc, 1984)

All of these releases of *The Empire Strikes Back* featured similar artwork from Roger Kastel's style A theatrical poster and bore the CBS/Fox Video

logo, as expected. The LaserDisc jacket⁴⁵ boasted not only to be “Stereo Extended Play” but also to have Surround Sound.

The VHS and Beta releases were in identical standard, bottom-loading, cardboard cases (rather than drawer cases). For Beta, each VHS-sized case included a small cardboard insert (to keep the smaller cassette from sliding around like crazy⁴⁶) and blue “BETA” stickers over printed “VHS” logos. These cassette releases saw a new, black and white, vertical label design that was a significant departure from the labels used for ANH since 1982. The cover art for both TESB cassettes included a red triangle (rather than a red stripe) in the bottom right corner that noted the contents as “Hi-Fi Stereo” and “Digitally Mastered.”

As we will soon see reissues of these cassettes in subsequent years with identical packaging, it is important to note that this initial 1984 release of TESB was recognizable by a trailer for ANH on home video that could be found at the end of the cassette, after the film. Cassettes also continued the mismatch of cassette body and flap cover of many early VHS releases from the company.

The TESB CED caddy noted its content as “Stereo” on the bottom. Just like the 1983 reissue of ANH, the film's caddy was blue with a white spine. Yes, even sealed CEDs of TESB have this same blue/white mismatch, so this was a manufacturing issue.⁴⁷ Like the 1983 ANH release, the bottom of the caddy's label stretched all the way down, though in this case the indented grip area was still there, just covered. As a result, the label would get slightly “crinkled” over time due to being designed for a flat surface but constantly pressed into the recessed area.

As we have now seen three different audio notations, it behooves us to make sure it is clear what they each mean, as we will see audio options for *Star Wars* releases expand greatly during our journey from these early days

⁴⁵ There is some debate over whether to call the cardboard packaging of a LaserDisc a “jacket” or a “sleeve.” The terms seem to be used interchangeably, though most LaserDisc collectors I know tend to use the term “jacket” most often for the cardboard packaging, then “sleeve” to refer to the thin paper liner that the disc was put into before being placed inside the cardboard packaging.

⁴⁶ VHS cassettes were approximately 7.33 in. x 4 in., while Beta cassettes were approximately 6.14 in. x 3.75 in.

⁴⁷ Fellow collector Adam Parish actually spoke with someone from RCA about this, but no explanation was available after so long. It may remain a mystery.

to the present. Most CEDs in white caddies were “mono,” which is an abbreviation of “monaural,” meaning having just one source of sound. Mono material has a single audio channel, so that even when played through systems with more than one speaker available, the sound will be the same coming from all of them. Stereo, meanwhile, in its most basic form, just means two audio channels, typically one for left and one for right. That was the format used for the *Star Wars* film releases noted as “stereo” up to this point. With the 1984 LaserDisc of TESB, the saga took its first steps into Surround Sound. This provided another layer of audio immersion by adding a rear “surround” speaker (placed in the center, rather than to the left or right) beyond the two (left and right) or three (left, right, and center) speakers in front of the viewer. (The former setup would be considered 3.0, while the latter would be 4.0, using the number of total speakers to determine the designation. More on such numerical labeling later.) Audio could also be stored in either analog or digital form. At this point in the saga’s life cycle, all of these audio options were analog only.

1984 also saw another re-release of *A New Hope* on VHS and Beta to coincide with the first release of TESB. This re-release of ANH finally dropped drawer cases (5.06 in. x 7.5 in.) in favor of standard (4.25 in. x 7.5 in.), bottom-loading cases like the one used for TESB. As with TESB, the Beta release used a standard VHS case with a blue “BETA” sticker over the printed red VHS label on the spine and a cardboard insert to accommodate the smaller Beta cassette. The front of this release replaced the red stripe (or blue “BETA” triangle sticker) from 1983 with a red triangle that read “Hi-Fi Stereo.” Of note is the lack of the phrase “Digitally Mastered” that appeared on all TESB “red triangle” releases. (This will be important soon.)



ANH label

These 1984 releases were “no-frills” as well, though they now sported a

white-on-blue(ish) CBS/Fox Video animation before the film and (typically) an updated white label with black lettering, similar to what was now being used for *The Empire Strikes Back*. Unlike TESB, no trailer followed ANH on its cassette.

That “red triangle,” already different between ANH and TESB in 1984, would come back to cause confusion.

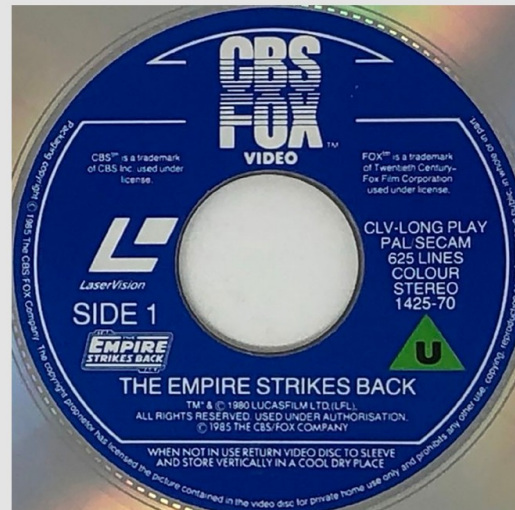
Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1984)

LaserDisc grew more slowly in the U.S. than in Japan, but its growth was even slower in the UK, where the format struggled to gain a foothold. As a result, by the time TESB reached home video in 1984, CBS/Fox Video decided to partner with local distributors to bring the film to the United Kingdom. The local partners included Lightning Distribution and SG Records & Video (the banner for S. Gold and Sons, Ltd.). Both firms have since dissolved. These initial TESB LaserDiscs were released in fairly small numbers, making them tough to find today.

Sleeve art featured Tom Jung's style B poster art, and the disc label was of similar style to the ANH release two years earlier, rebranded for CBS/Fox Video.



TESB (UK LaserDisc, 1984)



Disc label



Local distributor logos on back of jacket

As for cassette formats, TESB was available on VHS, Beta, and Video 2000, also similar to ANH.



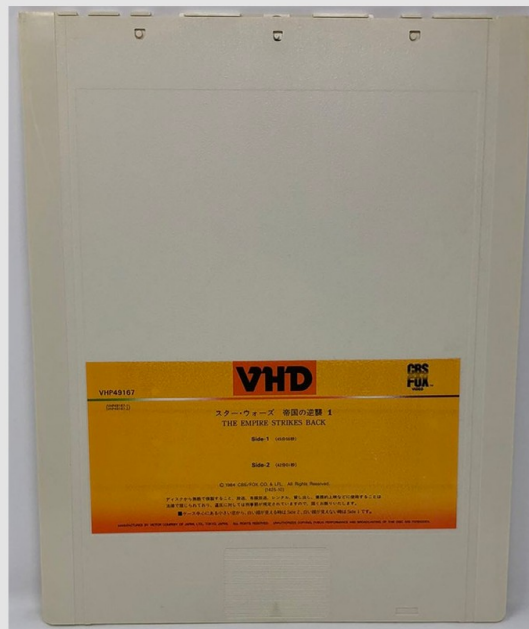
TESB (UK VHS/Beta/Video 2000, 1984)

Meanwhile in Japan (1984)

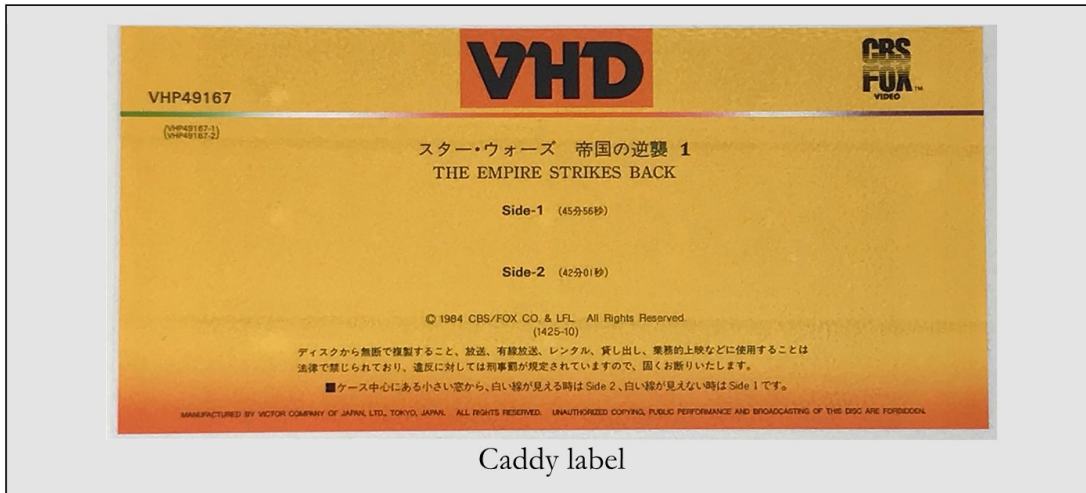
One year after ANH premiered on VHD in Japan, *The Empire Strikes Back* followed suit. Again, this was a two disc release with each disc's caddy within its own slipcover. Both slipcovers used identical artwork from what Japan considered style B poster artwork (not to be confused with style B in the West). The relatively lackluster caddy labels were also in keeping with the style found on ANH the previous year.



TESB (Japanese VHD, 1984) – two VHD caddies, each with its own slipcover



Caddy (only one fit into each separate slipcover)



Standard Play Saves the Day... from Time Compression (1985)

Star Wars LaserDiscs on the American market had thus far been CLV extended play discs, time compressed to fit an entire film on two sides of one disc to keep costs down. 1985 saw the first release of both ANH and TESB on CAV (Constant Angular Velocity) or “standard play” discs. CAV discs kept a consistent speed, reading one frame per revolution, rather than slowing down as content played, which allowed for less “crosstalk” (essentially data from adjacent tracks clashing and muddying up the picture) and thus better picture clarity, plus great freeze-frame features. Unfortunately, this was at the cost of capacity. Whereas an extended play CLV disc could hold an hour per side, a standard play CAV disc could only hold about half that. This meant that a single *Star Wars* film without time compression would require *five* sides of *three* discs (with one blank side) to hold the entire film. Three discs meant higher costs, causing these “Stereo Standard Play” releases (both noted for “Surround Sound,” a first for ANH) to retail for around \$70.⁴⁸ Jacket and label designs were similar to that of previous U.S. releases with text altered to befit a CAV product.

In being produced for CAV standard play discs, this was the very first time that neither film was time compressed for LaserDisc. However, the jackets incorrectly listed the same, shorter times as on the previous, time compressed releases, so a quick glance would easily have caused someone to believe they were still not the full theatrical length. The error was noted in LaserDisc publications, but in an era without the internet to spread that information widely, the unfortunate damage was done.

⁴⁸ This \$70 price tag would have been a little over \$165 in 2020 dollars.



ANH (LaserDisc, 1985)



TESB (LaserDisc, 1985)



ANH label comparison: 1983 extended play (left) vs. 1985 standard play (right)

**Color, Running Time: 118 Min.
1130-84**

Jackets (ANH in this case) incorrectly listed time compressed runtimes.

The First Remastering of *A New Hope* (1985)

1985 also presented an opportunity for Lucasfilm to fix a problem that had existed in *A New Hope* since it was just *Star Wars* in theaters. During its theatrical run, the film had been shown with either a stereo or mono soundtrack, depending on the capabilities of individual theaters. The two audio tracks were mostly identical in placement of sound and music, but

some key differences bear mentioning.⁴⁹

First, much of Shelagh Fraser's rerecorded dialogue that we think of as her "normal" performance as Beru Lars was not used for the mono soundtrack. Instead, a lighter performance was used, which gave a slightly different impression of the character.

Second, other individual lines were alternate takes, though few had the impact of Luke's frustrated cry during the Battle of Yavin, "Blast it, Biggs, where are you?" The scene shows Luke chased by a TIE fighter that he cannot shake until Wedge Antilles swoops in to his rescue. For Luke to be asking where *Biggs* is at that moment suggests a frustration that his old buddy from childhood is with him in this mess but not there to "have his back" when it really matters. It is a moment of friendship under stress. However, this may not have been the original intent, as the mono soundtrack used a take with far less subtext: "Blast it, *Wedge*, where are you?" He was just waiting for Wedge to save his nerf bacon.

Third, and most well-known, was the infamous missing C-3PO line. In both stereo and mono mixes, R2-D2 plugs into the Death Star's computer network (and apparently downloads a plethora of data, including all but one piece of a map to the first Jedi Temple on Ahch-To, but that's getting a few films and decades ahead of ourselves). After a moment, C-3PO translates R2-D2's various beeps: "He says he's found the main controls to the power beam that's holding the ship here. He'll try to make the precise location appear on the monitor." The monitors then begin flashing images of the tractor beam components that show our heroes what they need to disable.

In the mono mix, C-3PO continues explaining as the images appear: "The tractor beam is coupled to the main reactor in seven locations. A power loss at one of the terminals will allow the ship to leave." Obi-Wan then declares that the others can't help in this instance, so he must go alone. His plan to tackle the tractor beam is clear.

The stereo mix, however, was completely missing C-3PO's explanation as the images played on the monitors. Instead, the sound effects played as normal, but the characters said nothing, just mutely watched the pretty pictures. Then Ben headed out, and all we knew for sure was that our heroes knew *where* to go. How were they to take down the tractor beam?

⁴⁹ While the mono mix has never been released on retail home media, it was found on the 16 mm copy of the film (see the chapter *Glimmers of Hope*). Over the years, fans (most notably "Puggo") have captured the 16 mm version as part of fan-driven restoration and archival efforts, so it is possible to find an unofficial copy of the film online with its mono soundtrack intact.

Hopefully the characters knew because the audience sure didn't.

This line was actually restored to the stereo soundtrack for the film's first theatrical re-release on July 21, 1978, but it was the original 1977 stereo mix, which neglected to include C-3PO's tractor beam explanation, that was used for all of the film's home video releases from 1982 through 1985. In 1985, though, Ben Burtt supervised a new digital stereo sound mix, almost entirely identical to the original stereo mix but crisper with a greater dynamic range. In the process, Burtt corrected the original error and added C-3PO's missing line back into the film. That mix found its way to home video on VHS and Beta for the first time in 1986.

Return of the C-3PO Dialogue, Arrival of Another Trailer (1986)

The digitally remastered sound mix supervised by Ben Burtt in 1985 saw home video release in the next VHS and Beta reissue of *A New Hope* in 1986. These cassettes bore the same white and black label as most 1984 copies, making them indistinguishable by label. However, their packaging bore one small change that allows keen-eyed collectors to distinguish 1984 copies from 1986 or 1987 (with 1988's similar packaging being much easier to distinguish). Whereas the 1984 packaging's red triangle referred to the film as "Hi-Fi Stereo," the 1986 version with the restored C-3PO line and new sound mix included a tiny "Digitally Mastered" beneath the "Hi-Fi Stereo" label, identical to the red triangles found on 1984's *The Empire Strikes Back* VHS and Beta releases. This "Digitally Mastered" notation was also found beneath the "Hi-Fi Stereo" text on the cassette case's spine beginning in 1986.



Case comparison: 1984 (left) vs. 1986 (right) –
Note the slight change to the triangle.



ANH triangle comparison: 1984 (left) vs. 1986 (right)



Left to right: 1984 VHS, 1984 Beta, 1986 VHS, 1986 Beta –
Note the absence or inclusion of “Digitally Mastered” and “BETA” stickers.

Forever Tinkering:

A New Hope's Digitally Mastered Audio (1986)

Honestly, I can barely tell a difference in the audio for ANH before and after the 1985 remastering. That said, fans who noticed were glad to see the C-3PO line return because that scene was just a bit “off” without it.

TESB was also reissued this year, using identical packaging as in 1984. What helped to distinguish both the 1986 ANH and TESB releases from their 1984 counterparts (aside from the audio remastering and “Digitally Mastered” notations for ANH) was the style of CBS/Fox Video logo animation that began each cassette and the presence (or not) of a trailer. The CBS/Fox logo animation used in 1984 featured a white logo against a blue(ish) background and a “grid” pattern. The 1986 version featured textured blue words over black. Furthermore, while the 1984 release of ANH lacked any trailers and TESB included a trailer for ANH after the film, the 1986 releases included a trailer for all three of the trilogy’s episodes *after* the film.⁵⁰ That preview was preceded by a vocal introduction that

⁵⁰ This made it a true “trailer,” a preview added to the end of a film, akin to how theatrical film reels often had previews spliced to their ends.

played against a blank, black screen.

Yes, like the “Digitally Mastered” notation that was key to distinguishing 1984 and 1986 releases of ANH, the location of that trailer and how it was introduced will be important very soon.

End of a Trilogy, Finale of a Format (1986)

Even more important to fans in 1986 (who did not have the internet yet to share their geeking out over C-3PO getting his dialogue back), this was the year that finally saw the release of *Return of the Jedi* on home video.

The initial release of ROTJ arrived on Feb. 25, 1986, the same month TESB premiered on HBO. Cover artwork for all four formats bore Kazuhiko Sano's style B theatrical poster art. Labels for VHS, Beta, and LaserDisc were in the standard style of the period, as seen previously with ANH and TESB.

The VHS and Beta releases were similar to the 1986 versions of ANH and TESB. Each was a “no-frills” release with the blue and black CBS/Fox logo animation and a trailer (with its blank screen introduction) after the film. Packaging somewhat matched the format of the other two films, including a red “Hi-Fi Stereo” (but not “Digitally Mastered”) triangle that was, for some reason⁵¹, moved to the upper left corner.



ROTJ (VHS/Beta, 1986)



ROTJ triangle (no “Digitally Mastered”)

⁵¹ I'd wager it was because the ROTJ logo took up almost the entire width of the case along the bottom of the artwork.

The LaserDisc and CED releases of *Return of the Jedi* brought a change that many fans did not realize they wanted but that videophiles had been hoping would one day occur. For the first time, a *Star Wars* film premiered on those formats *without* time compression. Rather than attempting to squish the film's entire 132 min. runtime to fit onto one CLV disc, CBS/Fox Video produced a *two*-disc CLV LaserDisc release (billed as "Stereo Extended Play" with "Digital Sound" on the front of its jacket, along with an odd occurrence of the 20th Century Fox logo, despite the CBS/Fox Video logo still in the top right corner). This allowed the film to be viewed without time compression across both sides of a first disc, then just one side of a second (with the fourth available side blank).

The "Digital Sound" notation was important, as it marked another milestone in the saga's audio development on home video. Whereas previous Surround Sound options (on the 1985 CAV release of ANH and both LaserDisc releases of TESB thus far) had been analog, this was the first time that a digital Surround Sound option was available. (ANH and TESB would get digital Surround Sound for the first time in their *Special Widescreen Edition* releases, which we will see later this chapter.)



ROTJ (LaserDisc, 1986)

**Color, Running Time 132 Min.
1478-80**

Time notation on back correctly showed lack of time compression for the first time.

Not to be outdone, the CED release (a format that was at this point on its deathbed) also spread the film in its uncompressed form across three sides of two discs (platters), though the nature of CEDs meant that buyers were purchasing two of the already cumbersome caddies for the film, labeled as "Part One" and "Part Two" and "in Stereo."

This would be the last time a *Star Wars* film appeared on a Capacitance Electronic Disc. The last CEDs of any kind would roll off the production lines by the end of 1986. Interestingly, the fact that CED was dying as a

format as ROTJ was released led to an odd aspect of the film's availability on CED. During production of ROTJ CEDs, RCA apparently ran out of the blue caddies that were typically used for stereo releases, including ROTJ. Rather than producing more blue caddies to continue with ROTJ production, they simply switched to white caddies, which remained available, even though they were traditionally used for mono releases.⁵² Some of the white caddies also still had the small indentations (i.e. handles) of earlier CEDs, just covered by the large label.⁵³ If 1983 – 1984's strange mixture of blue caddy and white spine had formed cracks in the white/blue division of CEDs, ROTJ and its contemporaries shattered that color scheme during the death throes of RCA's vinyl home video format.



ROTJ (CED, 1986) – blue caddies

⁵² It was again *Star Wars* home video collector and CED aficionado Adam Parish who was able to get confirmation of this from a former RCA employee involved in CED production at the time.

⁵³ I'm assuming this was just because some of the white caddies that were used when they ran out of blue caddies had handles, while others did not, rather than assuming any rhyme or reason to which caddies had or did not have the indentations. For the record, my white ROTJ CED set has a covered indentation on the first caddy, but not on the second.



ROTJ (CED, 1986) – white caddies

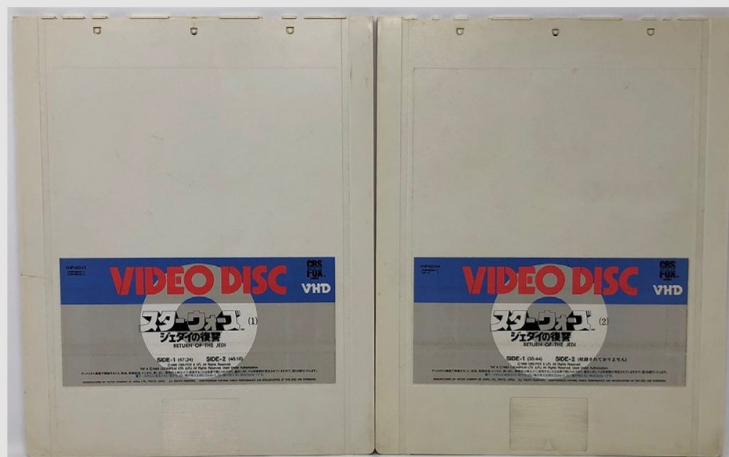
Meanwhile in Japan (1986)

As *Return of the Jedi* premiered on home video in Japan, the *Original Trilogy* was completed on VHD, thanks to a release of ROTJ that deviated somewhat from the pattern previously set by ANH and TESB. Like its predecessors, the film was spread across two discs in two caddies. However, rather than housing those caddies individually in a pair of virtually identical slipcovers, both of the caddies for ROTJ were stored together in a single, deeper slipcover featuring Tim Reamer's style A (AKA "lightsaber") poster art.

Caddy labels were also a bit more stylish this time around. Rather than the typical orange label with small, black text and "VHD" at the top, these labels contained a blue upper region with "Video Disc" in red and other information (CBS/Fox Video logo, "VHD," etc.) smaller to either side, while a lower, gray region featured the Japanese logo for the film in black and white with other, standard text. The blue and gray regions were connected, after a fashion, by a white disc (more like a thick "O" as it had a fairly large hole in the center compared to an actual VHD) behind the text.



ROTJ (Japanese VHD, 1986) – two VHD caddies in a single slipcover



Caddies (both of which fit inside the single slipcover)



Caddy label

Unfortunately for fans of the format, it would not survive much longer.

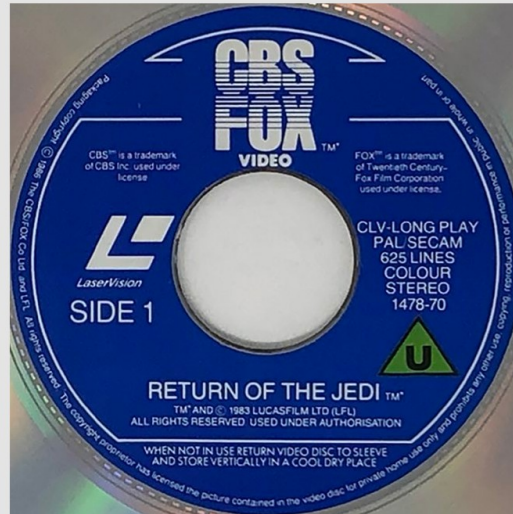
Star Wars would only see one more release on VHD: *Caravan of Courage* in 1987.⁵⁴

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1986)

As with TESB, when *Return of the Jedi* reached LaserDisc in the UK, the relatively small market for the format resulted in the need of a partnership with local distributors Lightning Distribution and SG Records & Video (i.e. S. Gold and Sons, Ltd.).



ROTJ (UK LaserDisc, 1986)



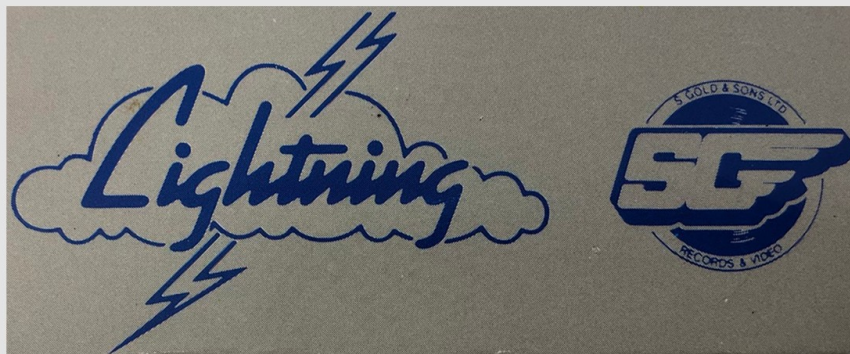
Disc label

Even with PAL speedup, this 132 min. film was only reduced to 126 min., resulting in a two-disc, CLV extended play release, which made use of its need for two disc storage slots to present the film in a folding jacket with cover art similar to all of the American releases (Kazuhiko Sano's style B poster artwork) and an interior spread featuring a shot of the heroes aboard the *Tydirium*. The disc label was the same standardized white text on a blue background as the previous films.

⁵⁴ See the chapter *Teddy Bears, Towanis, and Trouble Again* in *Volume III*.



Jacket (open)



Local distributor logos on back of jacket

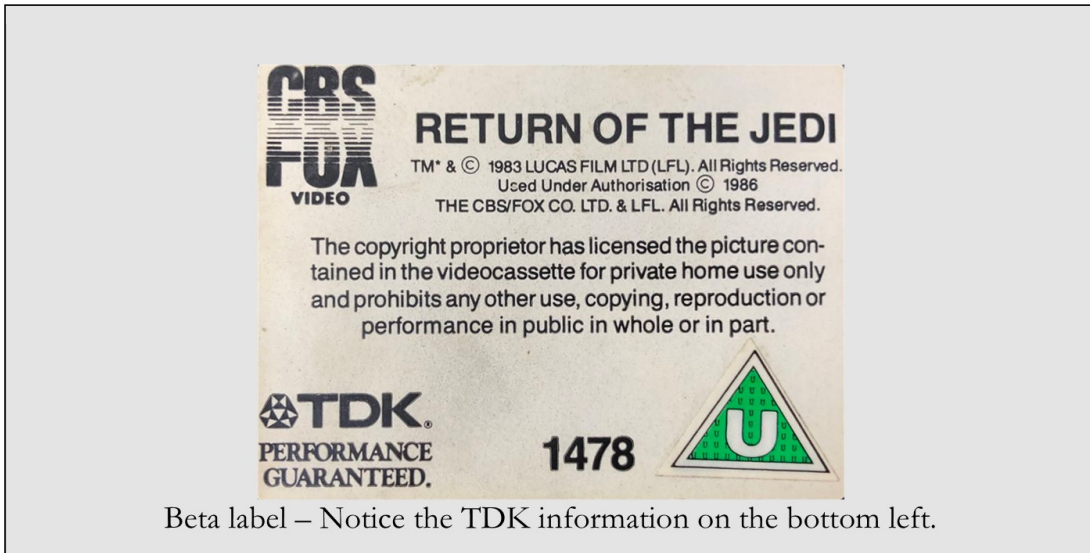
The film was also available on VHS and Beta, and those releases included what fans in the U.S. might consider an unusual “feature.” Cassettes for this release were provided by TDK (best known to consumers in the U.S. as a producer of blank cassettes for recording at home). As such, TDK (“performance guaranteed”) branding was found on both the spine and label for these releases.



ROTJ (UK VHS/Beta, 1986)



TDK branding on spine



Beta label – Notice the TDK information on the bottom left.

Leading with a Trailer (1987)

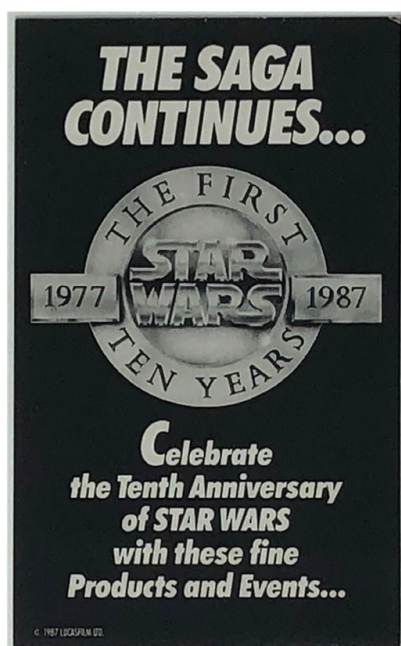
In 1987, all three *Original Trilogy* films were released again on VHS in packaging that was identical to the releases in 1986. The only difference between these items and those in 1986 was how the trailer for the films was handled. Rather than playing *after* each film as in 1986, the trailer now appeared *before* each film. The trailer was still preceded by a vocal introduction, but now it played over an animated 10th Anniversary *Star Wars* logo, rather than against a blank background. Unfortunately, the only way to tell the 1986 and 1987 releases apart once out of their shrink wrap was to actually play them. Only the presence (or lack thereof) and location of the trailer differentiated the cassettes themselves.⁵⁵ Fortunately, when still in shrink wrap, most copies proliferating in 1987 bore a sticker on their shrink wrap with the saga's 10th Anniversary logo.

⁵⁵ It has been suggested that since some of the 1986 – 1989 copies have a UPC barcode at the bottom of one side of their cases and others do not, that *must* be a way to tell the two “digitally mastered” ANH releases apart. Sadly, it isn’t. That appears to be just a packaging variant, not an indicator of release year. And, yes, the fact that the other differences only appear if you actually watch the cassettes makes acquiring one of each type a real challenge when most secondary market sellers (such as on eBay) don’t usually bother to check for those kinds of details.

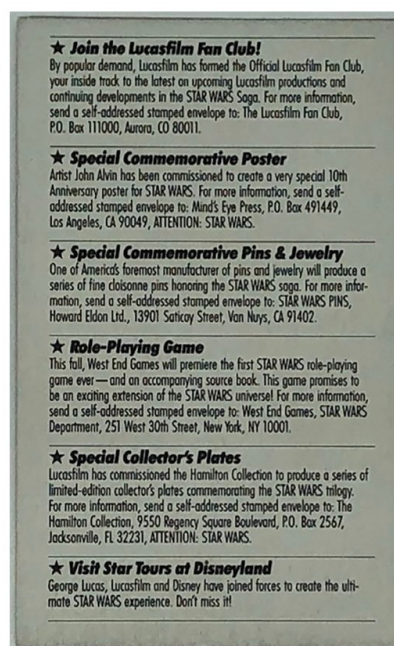


10th Anniversary logo sticker found on shrink wrap for 1987 reissues

I would also note that later copies in this period included an advertising card with a 1987 copyright date. The card featured the tagline “The saga continues,” the 10th Anniversary *Star Wars* logo, and an invitation to “celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of *Star Wars* with these fine Products and Events...” The back provided a list of the aforementioned products, including: the Lucasfilm Fan Club; commemorative pins, jewelry, and a poster; collector’s plates; the upcoming West End Games *Star Wars* Roleplaying Game; and the *Star Tours* attraction at Disneyland.



Card (front)



Back

Unfortunately, finding an open copy today with the card intact or a cassette still in the original shrink wrap with its sticker is fairly difficult, leaving the trailer location and introductory style the primary means of differentiating copies from 1986 and 1987.

Meanwhile in Japan (1986 – 1987)

In Japan, LaserDisc was more popular than it was for most of its lifespan in the U.S. It tended to attract film buffs for whom picture and sound quality trumped all, as the goal of having a theatrical experience in the home was pursued more vigorously. As a result, Japan became the first market in which the *Star Wars* films could be seen on home video in widescreen.

This began in 1986 with the release of ANH as part of the Japanese *Special Collection*. TESB and ROTJ followed in 1987. Each *Special Collection* LaserDisc release included three standard play CAV discs that spread each film (without time compression) across five of the six available sides. Each film was letterboxed⁵⁶ widescreen with the image shifted a bit higher than would be normal for later American releases in order to accommodate Japanese subtitles built into the letterboxed picture beneath the movie.

These releases were easily distinguished from others by their wide white borders and gold *Special Collection* title across the top of the jacket front. Inside those borders were classic poster artwork (Tom Jung's ANH style A, the Japanese TESB style B, and Kazuhiko Sano's ROTJ style B). Discs were slipped into this outer jacket once placed into an inner jacket that bore the film's title, *Special Collection* logo, CBS/Fox Video logo, and side numbers available on that disc. Disc labels were in the standard CBS/Fox Video style for Japan at the time (a blue top portion with the company logo and a white area beneath with other logos, the film's title, etc.).

American widescreen releases would not begin arriving until 1989.

⁵⁶ We will dive into what “letterboxed” actually means later in this chapter when we see our first U.S. letterboxed release in 1989.

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



ANH *Special Collection* (Japanese LaserDisc, 1986) – with obi



ANH *Special Collection* (Japanese LaserDisc, 1986) – without obi



TESB *Special Collection* (Japanese LaserDisc, 1987) – without obi



ROTJ *Special Collection* (Japanese LaserDisc, 1987) – without obi



Inner jacket (ANH)



Disc label (ANH)

Since this is our first look at a product from Japan that includes one, I should note that media products in Japan often included a paper slip with information about the product, known as an “obi.” For LaserDiscs, these were often found running along the left side of a product, though sometimes one might see them running horizontally or even just covering a single corner. Collectors often spend a bit more to acquire a vintage home video item that includes the original obi, given than many were often discarded in this era.

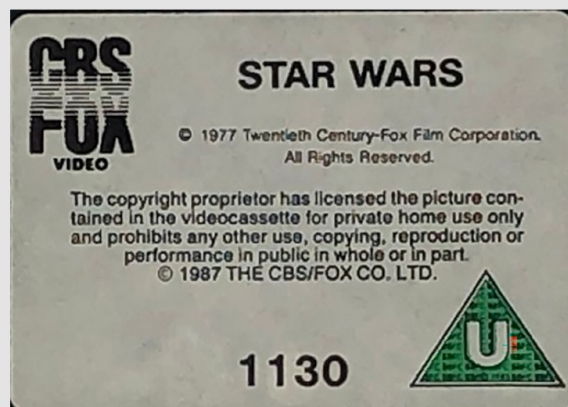
Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1987 – 1989)

In the United States, fans had to wait five years for *A New Hope* to arrive on home video (both for rent and purchase). Granted, this was in an era when purchasing home video items was relatively rare, but it took *half a decade* to go from the original theatrical release into our homes. At last, as of 1982, we could own the first (er, fourth) episode of the saga on VHS!

In the United Kingdom, fans who frequented specialty stores or took advantage of a *New Voyager* magazine promotion could acquire the film on VHS around the same time, but for fans waiting on a widely available retail release (a “sell-through” product), the wait took *another* five years. When a sell-through VHS release finally arrived, it was as part of a collection labeled as *The All Time Great Movies*. Cover art used Tom Jung’s style A poster art again, this time bordered in silver/gray with a box for cast/crew information at the bottom and a banner running diagonally across the top that declared the product line’s name. Labels were plain black text on a white background with the CBS/Fox logo. The only dash of color on the label was the film’s rating symbol.



ANH (UK VHS, 1987)



Label

The British market then made up for lost time. In 1988, CBS/Fox

Video released all three *Original Trilogy* films on VHS, labeled as *CBS/Fox Video All Time Greats*. Artwork was similar to previous UK releases with minor rearrangements of elements to provide a cleaner look with a matching product line logo on the bottom of each cover. A boxed set was also available, the same year as the *Star Wars Trilogy 3-Pack* in the U.S. and two years prior to the first U.S. “boxed set” in 1990 (for both, see below).



ANH, TESB, ROTJ (UK VHS, 1988)

One year later, the UK saw *another* release of the trilogy, this time in matching packaging that removed all logos from the same, tried and true cover artwork, except for each film's title, the CBS/Fox Video logo, and UK rating. I would note that this 1989 release was reissued repeatedly until replaced by new masters in 1994, leading to frequently finding cases dated 1989 with cassette labels dated whatever year that particular cassette was produced.



ANH, TESB, ROTJ (UK VHS, 1989)

Among the interesting features of UK retail releases of this era was that they, like their rental counterparts, were typically packaged within clamshell cases that were often clear⁵⁷, which allowed packaging to sometimes include interior artwork (which could be seen through the clear case) but allowed only one side (spine) to have artwork. Top and bottom artwork were nonexistent. This makes UK VHS collecting today more space-consuming than American VHS collecting, though one could argue that the extra space is balanced by not having any parts of the cassettes actually open to the environment.

Even more interesting in this era of UK *Star Wars* home media was a release of the films in 1988 on a format that saw no retail releases at all for the saga in the United States. The format in question was called Video8 (also known as “8 mm video”). As the name suggests, this was another magnetic tape format, but rather than using the 12.7 mm wide tape found in a VHS or Beta cassette (or even the 12.5 mm wide Video 2000 type), this consumer cassette format, developed by Sony and Kodak, used magnetic tape that was only 8 mm wide.

Sony had been in the analog videocassette development market for a while. They had been a developer of U-matic (19 mm) videocassettes that hit the market in 1971 and eventually became a staple of television production but not consumer use.⁵⁸ Sony tried again with Beta in 1975, but the rapid growth of VHS made it clear that Beta was in danger. Then in 1984, after development under Sony and Kodak, the Video8 format was launched as Sony’s third attempt at a videocassette format for the consumer market.

Video8 was actually designed with the consumer camcorder (video camera) market in mind, rather than the market for prerecorded video content like movies. At the time that Kodak unveiled the first Video8 cassettes in 1984 and Sony released a commercially successful Video8 camera (the Handycam) in Japan in 1985, the camcorder market was dominated by JVC’s VHS-C format (which used regular VHS magnetic tape

⁵⁷ This shade of packaging is interchangeably called “clear,” “frosted,” “transparent,” and “translucent.” In this guide, I will typically refer to it simply as “clear.”

⁵⁸ See the 1997 *Special Edition Trilogy* press kit in the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III*.

in a smaller cassette) and, ironically, Sony's Beta format. Video8, however, was a smaller cassette⁵⁹ than either (even if only by a small amount for VHS-C), which allowed greater portability in terms of both smaller cassettes and, more importantly, camcorders. In that market, Video8 thrived, but what about prerecorded content? Would there be a market for movies on Video8 to compete with VHS in any substantial way?

Well... no, not really. Not in America, at least. It never really caught on and certainly was never any real threat to VHS, but there were at least a few companies willing to give Video8 home video releases a shot. Paramount Home Video, for example, released *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* on Video8 in 1986. CBS/Fox Video and then Fox Video were less willing to dive into a market already saturated by VHS, which had the unfortunate result of Video8 being a format that actually existed for home video on the American market but which did not see any retail *Star Wars* releases.

Meanwhile, the market for Video8 movies was apparently more inviting in places like the United Kingdom and Japan. Thus, all three *Original Trilogy* films saw release on Video8 cassettes in the UK as part of the aforementioned *CBS/Fox Video All Time Greats* line with similar (but obviously smaller) packaging and labels.

⁵⁹ Video8 cassettes measured 3.74 in. x 2.46 in. x 0.59 in., while VHS-C was 3.62 in. x 3.28 in. x 0.78 in. Beta, meanwhile, was a relatively gargantuan 6.14 in. x 3.75 in. x 1 in. (By comparison, a standard case for a compact audiocassette, which most readers are probably more familiar with due to their ubiquity in the 1980s, measured about 4.3 in. x 2.7 in. x 0.66 in.)



ROTJ (UK Video8, 1988)



Cassette (with label)

These are exceptionally rare today, just like their counterparts from Japan that we will explore later in this chapter. Collectors in the U.S. who want to add something on Video8 to their *Star Wars* home video library have quite a hunt ahead of them to find surviving copies from those markets, but there were some oddball instances of non-retail Video8 *Star Wars* items in the U.S. that seem a bit easier to acquire. For example, in 1999, as Pizza Hut, KFC, and Taco Bell were ramping up their “Defeat the Dark Side” promotional campaign to tie into *The Phantom Menace*, training videos were provided to stores on Video8.



Pizza Hut “Defeat the Dark Side” Training Cassette (Video8, 1999)

Own the Trilogy, But Not in One Box (1988)

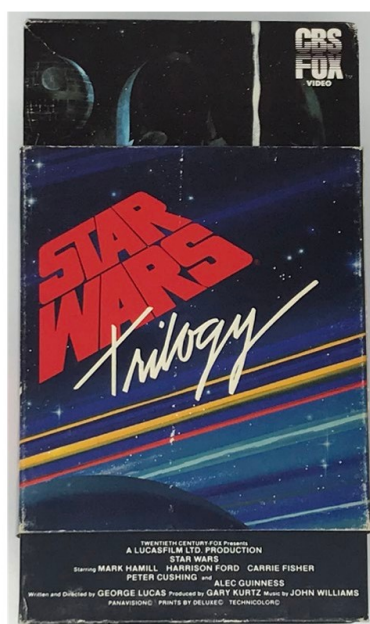
With the release of *Return of the Jedi* in 1986, fans could finally own the entire *Original Trilogy* on VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, and CED.⁶⁰ For a while, though, the only way to own the entire trilogy was by owning each film separately.

In 1988, CBS/Fox Video finally released the *Star Wars Trilogy 3-Pack*. This was a set of all three individual films (with trivia/fan club cards) in their standard packaging from 1986 – 1987 with a tiny new holographic dot added to the top of each case's back. The cassettes were then bound together by a paper band that proclaimed this pack to be the *Star Wars Trilogy*. While not a true “boxed set” and something that quickly broke down into three individual cassettes and a piece of paper to be tossed out with the week's garbage, this was the first attempt by CBS/Fox Video to provide American fans with the entire film saga up to that point in one purchase. It also marked the inception of the “*Star Wars Trilogy*” title (though not the same logo) that would be used on trilogy packaging for several years, leading to some confusion in 1990 when boxed sets would bear a copyright notice of 1988 that referred not to the boxed set itself but to the *Star Wars Trilogy* label it carried.

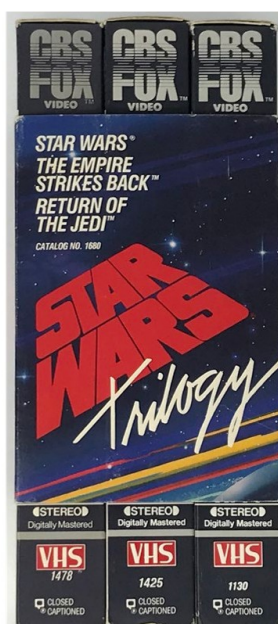
⁶⁰ And if you didn't remember that, those trilogy and 10th Anniversary trailers were there to remind you!



The 1988 “set” was simply these latest releases bound together with a paper band.



Star Wars Trilogy 3-Pack (VHS, 1988) – front view with paper band



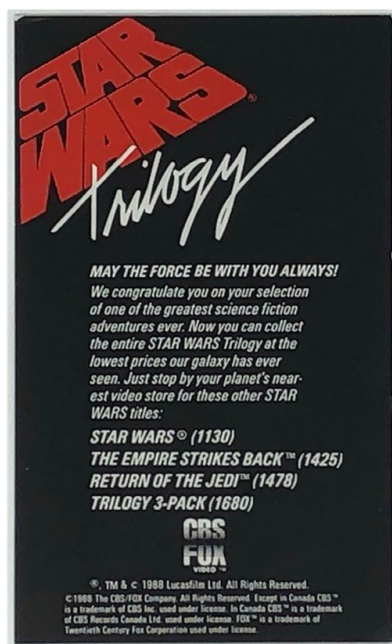
Side view with paper band



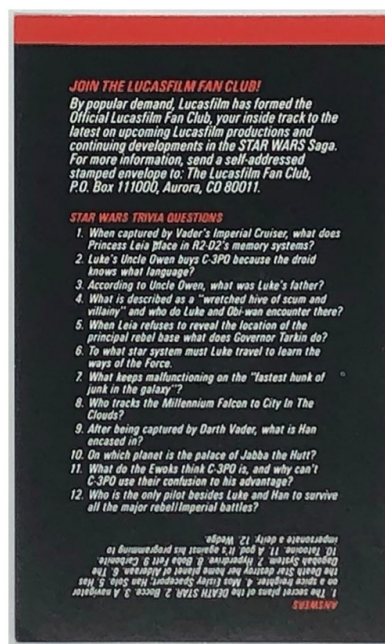
Top of ANH VHS case back: 1984 – 1987 (left) vs. 1988 (right) – Notice the presence of the holographic dot on individual and 3-pack covers, starting in 1988.

Like the 1987 reissues of the films, copies released both individually and in the *3-Pack* in 1988 included an advertising card. This was a new card with

a 1988 copyright date. It bore advertising on one side and two sections on the reverse: one about the Official Lucasfilm Fan Club and the other a set of twelve decent *Star Wars* trivia questions.



Card (front)



Back

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1989)

Long after VHS and other formats had turned Super 8 from a mainstay of home viewing into just a novelty for collectors, Derann Film Services in the UK acquired the rights to distribute certain films from 20th Century Fox on Super 8. In 1989, they released a widescreen (“scope”) Super 8 copy of the entire ANH film, followed soon thereafter by ROTJ (but not TESB). Another company in the UK, Classic Home Cinema, released TESB in similar fashion in the 1990s. Unfortunately, no such full-length releases of the films on Super 8 were released on the American market.

Widescreen (in America) at Last! (1989 – 1994)

During the Great Format War of the 1970s and 1980s, LaserDisc did not lead the way in terms of adoption in U.S. households, but it became the preferred medium of fans for whom sound and picture quality were of paramount importance (rather than being able to record content on such media or other considerations). As such, it should be no surprise that when *Star Wars* films finally arrived on the U.S. market in widescreen format, it was on LaserDisc.

It is worth taking a moment here to discuss the concept of aspect ratios. The term refers to the ratio of an image’s width to its height, generally

expressed as “width:height” when written, sometimes simplified to make height “1” (such as in the case of a typical standard definition television having an aspect ratio of 1.33:1) and sometimes without reducing either to “1” in order to remain easier for a layman to conceptualize (such as the same 1.33:1 aspect ratio being referred to instead as “4:3,” which is easier to visualize).

Before the advent of high definition (HD), most televisions were in the “standard” 4:3 (or 1.33:1) aspect ratio, 1/3 wider than tall. However, movies in theaters were significantly wider than television dimensions. (The typical modern aspect ratio for a widescreen film is 2.35:1 or 2.39:1.) As a result, there were two ways back then to handle bringing a film from theaters into the living room, both of which will be important for *Star Wars* home video collectors to understand.

The first was known as “pan and scan.” An editor checked the original widescreen scenes and determined which part of the image was the focus of any given shot. That area was then *scanned*, so that about 43% of the overall width of the picture was removed, leaving the full *height* of the frame. What remained would fit exactly onto a 4:3 television screen. When action in a scene changed from one area to another, it could move out of the area being scanned, so the editor would either simply change scanning position between frames or shift the scanned area slightly frame by frame, until it showed the new focus area. The result of the latter option was that our view would pan from side to side at times to follow action that would not require shifting our view if we were watching in widescreen. The result of this pan and scan process is usually referred to these days as “full screen.”⁶¹

The downside of the pan and scan method is hopefully obvious in this age of widescreen televisions: a significant portion of the picture was lost! We were so used to this until the mid-1990s, though, that only film buffs tended to care (or often even notice) that the films we watched on TV or home video weren’t showing us everything we saw in theaters. The plus side was that it did indeed live up to the “full screen” moniker, taking up the entire television screen. This was the method used for all VHS, Beta, LaserDisc, and CED American *Star Wars* film releases prior to 1989.

The second method that could be used to fit a widescreen image onto a 4:3 television screen was what is known as “letterboxing.” This method

⁶¹ This can be confusing today, since “full screen” on a 4:3 television is not the same as the full dimensions of a modern, widescreen television. This became more confusing later due to the term “full frame” (not “screen”) sometimes being used to refer to a full 16:9 widescreen television picture.

placed the entire widescreen image onto the TV screen, putting the right and left edges at the corresponding ends of the screen, similar to how pan and scan lined up the image by placing the top and bottom edges of the image at the top and bottom limits of the TV screen.

The issue that arose was that the image was not as tall as the television screen, so the picture was usually lined up around the middle of the screen's height, then black areas were added above and below the image to fill out the rest of the 4:3 screen. The result was a widescreen image that filled the entire *width* of the screen, but an image that was much narrower than the full height of the screen.

To mainstream 20th Century audiences, this was often considered worse than losing part of the image because now the characters on screen were smaller than they otherwise would be. Studios that released letterboxed films frequently had to include warnings to viewers that the black "bars" on top and bottom were normal, so that viewers would not freak out and think that their player, television, or copy of the movie was flawed. For example, the first widescreen VHS release for ANH (1992) displayed a message prior to the film that read: "This tape is presented in Fox Video's wide screen letterbox format which features the film in its original full screen⁶² presentation. It is normal for films presented in the letterbox format to have black borders at the top and bottom of the screen." For good measure, that was also followed by a special version of the blue-on-black CBS/Fox Video logo that spread to show a wider viewing area and had the phrase "special widescreen edition" below it.⁶³

It is also important to note that the black "bars" added to a letterboxed film were actually built into the movie, not just something televisions or players automatically filled in when necessary. The result was a 4:3 frame that just happened to house the action running along its midsection with black content above and below. Thus, if we were to play letterboxed content on a widescreen TV today (such as the 2006 *Original Trilogy* DVDs' bonus discs that featured the supposedly "unaltered" versions of the films⁶⁴), the reverse happens. The 4:3 picture is not wide enough to fill the entire screen, so black areas are added to the right and left. The result is a small widescreen image surrounded by large black areas to the right and left

⁶² Yup, the widescreen presentation was called "full screen" in the notice.

⁶³ We had to be warned both verbally and visually, apparently!

⁶⁴ More on those in the chapter *Rise of DVD, Demise of VHS*.

(provided by the TV or player), along with smaller black areas above and below (built into the picture source). Some modern televisions and players allow zooming in on a portion of the screen, enabling viewers to accommodate this and make the videos appear like modern widescreen films, but many devices do not have this zooming feature, resulting in a rather frustrating viewing experience today.

I should also briefly note that there *was* (and still sometimes is) such a thing as a reversal of this phenomenon. In such a case, a film would actually be created in 4:3 (or similar) aspect ratio, so that a full screen home video release presented the entire picture, rather than needing to cut off any width. For a widescreen release, black bars would then be added to the top and bottom of the picture, covering part of the film's height. In other words, viewers lost part of the picture for widescreen, rather than full screen, which was the complete opposite of how it usually worked. This kind of "full screen has the entire picture but widescreen doesn't" approach was referred to as "open matte." Thus far, *Star Wars* home video releases have *not* been open matte (barring the occasional expanded scene in IMAX dimensions then presented in standard widescreen on home video), so widescreen typically presented the entire picture, while full screen did not.

So, as of 1989, full screen was normal, while widescreen was something somewhat exotic for American home video audiences. Thanks to LaserDisc catching on more rapidly in Japan than in the U.S., Japanese audiences were more open to letterboxed widescreen presentations, and *A New Hope* had already arrived in widescreen in Japan in 1986, followed by *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* in 1987. Finally, those Japanese masters (copies from which other copies are made) became the basis for American releases (once Japanese subtitles were removed). These U.S. versions were dubbed *Special Widescreen Edition* releases and launched via CBS/Fox Video in 1989 with *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*.



ANH Special Widescreen Edition



TESB Special Widescreen Edition

(LaserDisc, 1989)

(LaserDisc, 1989)

Unlike their Japanese counterparts in the *Special Collection*, the American *Special Widescreen Editions* were on two CLV extended play discs each, rather than three CAV standard play discs. While this may have been disappointing to videophiles of the day, it is important to note that this was the very first time that a *Star Wars* fan could watch ANH and TESB in widescreen through an American release, and it was also only the second time that either film had been released on LaserDisc without time compression. (On the latter point, this was the *first* time that the lack of time compression was correctly shown on the jackets for ANH and TESB, due to the misprint on the 1985 CAV standard play releases.) These releases were followed by *Return of the Jedi* in 1990, also in widescreen (and still not time compressed).



ROTJ *Special Widescreen Edition* (LaserDisc, 1990)

Unfortunately, these were not quite the pristine widescreen copies that fans expected. The original Japanese masters had raised the letterboxed widescreen image higher on the screen than normal (to American eyes) so that Japanese subtitles could be placed below the film in the black area (instead of overlaid upon the picture by the player as DVDs, Blu-rays, etc. often display them today). When creating the American releases, the images were shifted down and the subtitles removed, which required new black matting on top and bottom. The result for ROTJ was an image still a tiny bit higher than normal, while ANH suffered from poor placement of the black matting that caused the image to “shrink” vertically as the film went

from one reel of content to the next. The aspect ratio widened (as the width proportionally became larger than the height because the height kept being squeezed) from 2.35:1 to as much as 2.55:1. In time, some fans inaccurately dubbed this the “Incredible Shrinking Aspect Ratio Edition.”⁶⁵



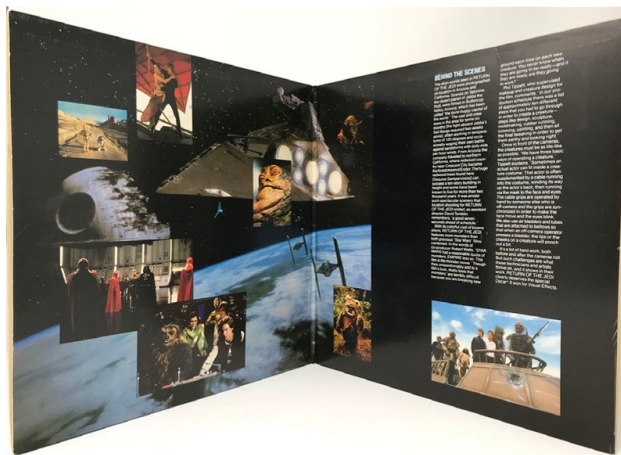
ANH *Special Widescreen Edition* jacket (open)

As with the 1986 VHS and Beta releases that included the red triangle in the packaging design on the *bottom right* (ANH and TESB) or the *top left* (ROTJ), packaging was also inconsistent across the *Special Widescreen Edition* line. ANH featured a gray bar at the top with a black and grey (or silver) logo for the *Special Widescreen Edition*. TESB featured a golden bar with a black and yellow logo. ROTJ featured a black bar with a black and yellow logo. All three were nice, folding jackets with info about the film and track content on the inside.

⁶⁵ The aspect ratio itself was getting *larger* as the *difference* between width and height became *larger* due to the height getting *smaller*. It would be better to refer to this perhaps as the “Incredible Shrinking Picture Edition” or “Incredible Shrinking Height Edition” because basic math is *not* on the side of those who refer to the aspect ratio (a numerical ratio between width and height) as what was shrinking. It was the opposite.



TESB *Special Widescreen Edition* jacket (open)



ROTJ *Special Widescreen Edition* jacket (open)

Variants are important to understand for the *Special Widescreen Edition* version(s) of ANH. In 1990, CBS/Fox Video, the unified banner under which CBS and 20th Century Fox properties had been released on home video since their merger in 1982, shifted its approach to once again treat releases from the two separately, despite remaining a single business entity. The result was that CBS releases would bear the CBS Video label, while Fox releases would now be labeled as Fox Video, rather than either being released under the CBS/Fox Video label. This transition was underway in 1990 and finally implemented in 1991, so that when the *Special Widescreen Edition* of *A New Hope* was reissued in 1992, it featured nearly identical packaging to its 1989 predecessor, but the CBS/Fox Video logo was replaced with the Fox Video logo. (This was the second time that the company's organizational change was reflected in logos used on home

video releases of the *Star Wars* films⁶⁶, and it would not be the last.) The updated Fox Video jacket also replaced “Laser Videodisc” in the bottom left corner with “LaserDisc,” while noting “Digital Sound” next to “Stereo Extended Play.” Labels were also redesigned such that the old CBS/Fox Video banner (with the company logo in the middle and lines going out from either side to create a “bar” was replaced by two side-by-side logos: the Fox Video logo and the *Special Widescreen Edition* logo. Other minor alterations included tweaks like changing the LaserVision logo (a red symbol over white text) to the LaserDisc logo (the same symbol over the word “LaserDisc,” only all white this time).



ANH *Special Widescreen Edition* jacket bottom (front) comparison:
1989 (top) vs. 1992 – 1994 (bottom)



ANH *Special Widescreen Edition* label comparison: 1989 (left) vs. 1992 – 1994 (right)

Many fans, myself included, have credited the Fox Video version with fixing the aspect ratio issue that affected the 1989 version from CBS/Fox Video. That is true... but only from a certain point of view (one I’d argue is

⁶⁶ Why specify that this was the second time for the *films*, not for *Star Wars* in general? See the saga of Magnetic Video Corporation in the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III*.

misleading).⁶⁷

It's not *just* the Fox Video label that denoted a fixed copy of ANH. The original, changing aspect ratio version of ANH in 1989 was pressed by Pioneer. It was pressed either in the U.S. or Japan, while the jacket was printed in the United States. This version used the Japanese master that required shifting the picture and new matting due to removed subtitles, resulting in the changing aspect ratio problem. The 1992 version from Fox Video was pressed in Japan by Mitsubishi, using the *same* master. That meant that these copies *also* had the aspect ratio problem! (Strangely, while they had the same masters and thus the same shrinking picture, they had slightly different chapter breaks, which were labeled the same way in their jackets.)

It was not until 1993 that the issue was fixed when the actual pressing of the discs was handled by Technidisc in the U.S., who used an entirely different master from the previous two (i.e. not just the Japanese version altered to remove subtitles). That 1993 version looked nearly identical physically to the 1992 version, as did subsequent copies from 1994 that simply reissued the Technidisc through a second printing. This was the fixed version fans had been hoping for, but spotting one could be tricky.

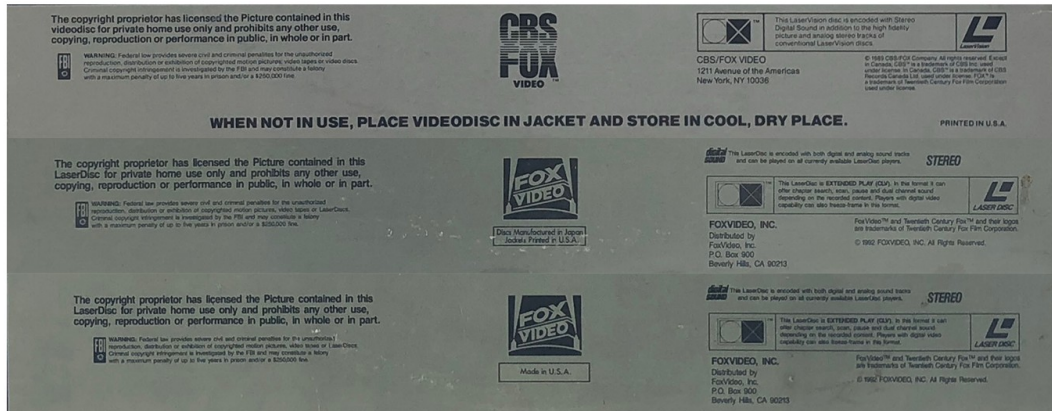
How could collectors tell these Fox Video versions apart? The copyright date was useless, as all jackets from 1992 – 1994 bore a 1992 copyright date on the back (i.e. the date of the jacket design, not the discs inside). However, there *was* a key indicator on the back of the jacket. Underneath the Fox Video logo, found at the bottom center of the jacket's rear, there was a small box with text that either noted that the disc was manufactured in Japan with the jacket printed in the U.S., or simply said the product was made in the U.S. (with no mention of Japan). Copies noting both Japan and the U.S. were the 1992 discs from Mitsubishi that carried over the problems from the 1989 Pioneer pressing for CBS/Fox Video. Copies that noted *only* the United States were the updated Technidisc version that fixed the aspect ratio issue.



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Fox Video's 1992 – 1994 releases all had a 1992 copyright date (for the jacket).

⁶⁷ I was misled by this lack of nuanced information until Apr. 2021, so, yes, this unclear information was also included in the previous edition of this guide. I apologize to those I might have led astray as I had been led astray myself.



ANH *Special Widescreen Edition* jacket bottom (back) comparison:
1989 Pioneer (top); 1992 Mitsubishi (middle); 1993 – 1994 Technidisc (bottom)

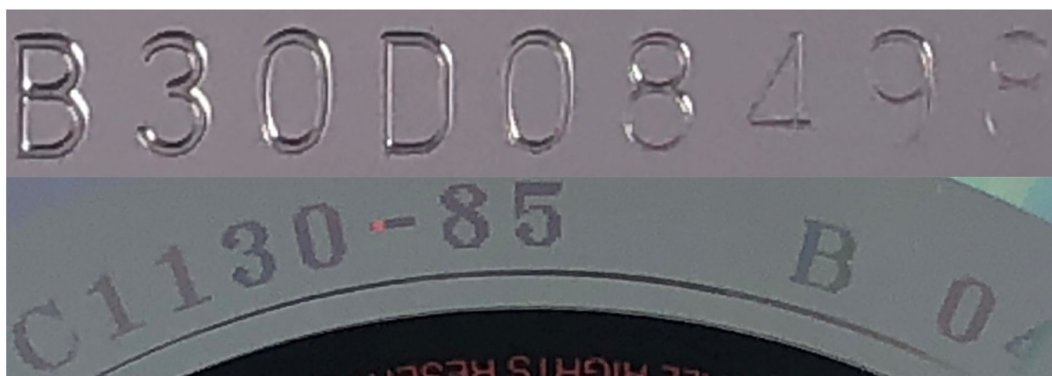


Fox Video logo and production indicator comparison:
1992 Mitsubishi (left) vs. 1993 – 1994 Technidisc (right)

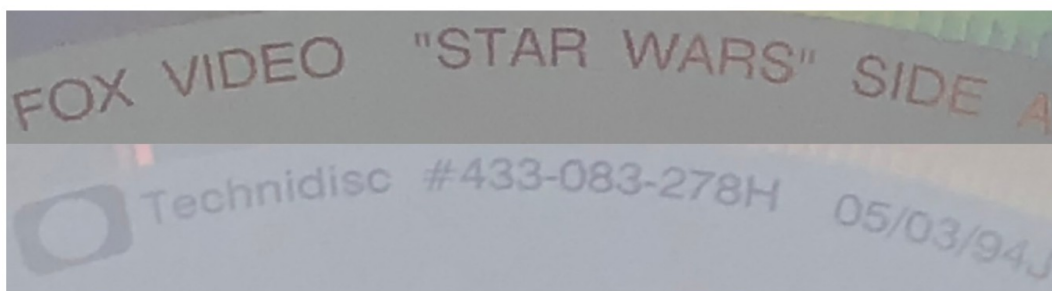
Fans could also look at the discs themselves to see the manufacturing markings around the label. The Technidisc text was smaller (and not a regular stamp) and actually said “Technidisc.” Those markings would also be how to determine whether a Technidisc pressing was from 1993 or 1994, though those appear to be identical, just two print runs of the same, updated discs.

Here’s the bad news. The Technidisc version is more rare (by far) than the Mitsubishi version, such that the vast majority of Fox Video copies of the ANH *Special Widescreen Edition* on the secondary market today have the same problems as the CBS/Fox Video version. However, for those who manage to find a Technidisc copy, the good news isn’t limited to the fixed aspect ratio. The jacket colors were also marginally more vibrant, and the colors in the actual film had a different (arguably better) look than in other pressing of its era. (Some have even argued that this was the best looking ANH LaserDisc ever produced, even compared to the THX remastered or *Special Edition* versions that came later, or at least the best CLV release.)

This was accompanied by the minor downside of more crosstalk on the Technidisc version, but it appears to have been a small price to pay for a fixed aspect ratio and generally better picture.



Information around the label indicated manufacturer. This more typical style was from Mitsubishi (1992) and indicated a disc with the aspect ratio problem.



Information around the label indicated manufacturer. This smaller, atypical style was from Technidisc (1993 – 1994) and indicated a “fixed” disc.

Boxed Sets and Bricks (1990 – 1992)

By 1990, the Format War was winding down. Beta releases of *Star Wars* ended with the reissues of the 1986 releases, and CED saga releases never made it past 1986. With DVD still five years away (and eleven years away for *Star Wars*), VHS and LaserDisc were the last formats standing.

After the *Original Trilogy* quasi-set in 1988 that bound the most recent VHS releases together with a paper band, it was finally time for a true “boxed set” to put the entire trilogy into a single package. The first such set arrived in 1990, bearing the CBS/Fox Video logo. The outer faces of the box were a slipcover that slid onto another package that held the actual cassettes. The slipcover featured the artwork familiar from previous releases (ANH and TESB style A poster art and style B for ROTJ) in a repeating pattern. One end bore the CBS/Fox Video logo, while the other featured a message from George Lucas.

The inner package held all three cassettes (in their own standard, bottom-loading VHS cases) vertically with flaps that could be folded out from each side, listing the films’ names, writers, directors, theatrical release

dates, box-office grosses, and Academy Award wins/nominations.

The inner packaging and the slipcover that went over it both bore a *Star Wars Trilogy* logo, albeit in a different style than in 1988. This has caused some confusion for collectors in the decades since because the first line of legal text (“legalese,” as I prefer to call it) on the bottom of the set listed a copyright date of 1988 (referring to the terminology, not the set). Sharp-eyed fans had to skim much farther down the text to spot the set’s own copyright date of 1990.⁶⁸

The individual cassette cases had a cleaner look this time around, with the same poster art (ANH and TESB style A poster art and style B for ROTJ, just like the slipcover) used without excessive labels or credits on the front. Spines featured a red CBS/Fox Video logo, the film’s own logo in yellow, and a small red rectangle with a character’s picture inside (Darth Vader, Yoda, or Wicket W. Warrick). The top of each case featured the same character and yellow title logo (without a CBS/Fox Video logo). The back of each case included a blue or purple rectangle at the bottom with cast/crew information and legalese, while the upper 2/3 (or so) featured an image from the film as a rectangular background, along with a pair of other film images inside red frames alongside a description of the film.



The Original Trilogy (VHS, 1990): outer (left) and inner (right) packaging

⁶⁸ In other words, if someone tries to sell you a boxed set of the *Original Trilogy*, claiming it is from 1988, there is no such thing, but it is *probably* this release from 1990. Check whether the box is branded CBS/Fox Video (1990) or Fox Video (1992).



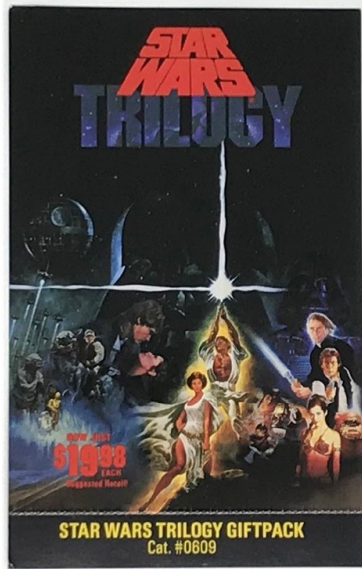
ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (VHS, 1990) – Cassettes were sold individually or within the *Original Trilogy* boxed set for the first time.

Before the film, ANH and TESB both featured a trailer for this boxed set, along with the 1989 release of *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*.⁶⁹ All three films still used the same white and black labels on each cassette as the product line had used since around 1984.

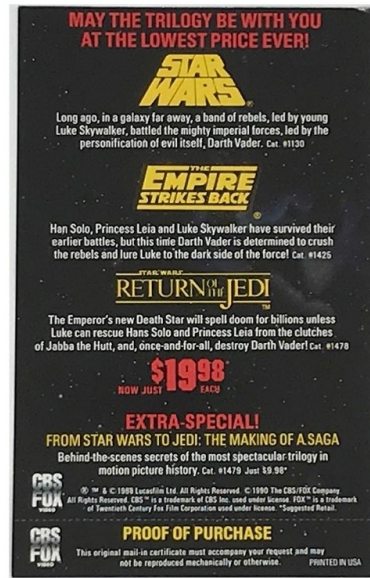
These 1990 copies also included a small advertising insert with a proof-of-purchase slip attached but perforated for easy removal. The insert referred to this set as the *Star Wars Trilogy Giftpack* (yes, with “gift” and “pack” as one word). It advertised all three films as being available individually “at the lowest price ever” (\$19.98), while *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* could be purchased for \$9.98.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ See the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III*.

⁷⁰ For comparison, \$19.98 would be around \$40 in 2020 dollars, the same as the MSRP (manufacturer's suggested retail price) for the *Ultimate Collector's Edition* release of *The Rise of Skywalker* in 2020. (See the chapter *All Together Now* in *Volume II*.) The \$9.98 price tag for *From Star Wars to Jedi* would've been about \$20 in 2020.



Insert (front)



Back

Two years later, one year after the implementation of the Fox Video label on 20th Century Fox's portion of the CBS/Fox Video library, the boxed set "brick" was reissued. This 1992 version featured slightly different packaging. The outer slipcover was identical with the exception of swapping the CBS/Fox Video logo for a Fox Video logo. The inner packaging was nearly identical, swapping out the logos as well but also changing the informational text on its flaps from white to silver. The individual cassette cases changed the most, particularly their backs. Instead of a rectangular film image overlaid with text and two smaller framed images situated above rectangular cast/crew boxes, these cases featured 2 – 3 blended images against a solid color background (without being in a box), which transitioned into black by the bottom, where cast/crew information was presented against that black background (also without being in a box). The case spines featured a red Fox Video logo, swapped in for this release, along with the same yellow film title as in 1990, but the character pictures were gone entirely. The lack of a character picture next to the yellow film title also applied to the top of the case. While the fronts were mostly unchanged, the ANH logo was shifted from the left side to the center.

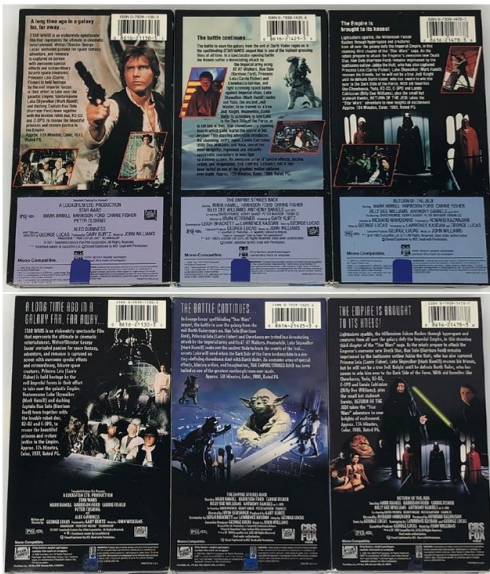


The Original Trilogy full screen (VHS, 1992): outer (left) and inner (right) packaging



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (VHS, 1992) – Cassettes were sold individually or within the *Original Trilogy* boxed set again.

The actual cassettes featured the same trailer before ANH and TESB as the 1990 set (and before ROTJ on some production runs of this set), which was a bit odd, considering that *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* received new packaging in 1992 but the trailer still showed the 1989 cover. Labels also changed. They now featured the film title as a white logo on a blue background, which faded into a green rectangle that held the film's rating and "HiFi Stereo, Mono Compatible" notice, followed by a white background beneath with the cassette's copyright, FBI warning, and other legalese.



Backs: 1990 (top) vs. 1992 (bottom)



Spines: 1990 (left) vs. 1992 (right)



Tops: 1990 (top) vs. 1992 (bottom)



Logos: 1990 (left) vs. 1992 (right)

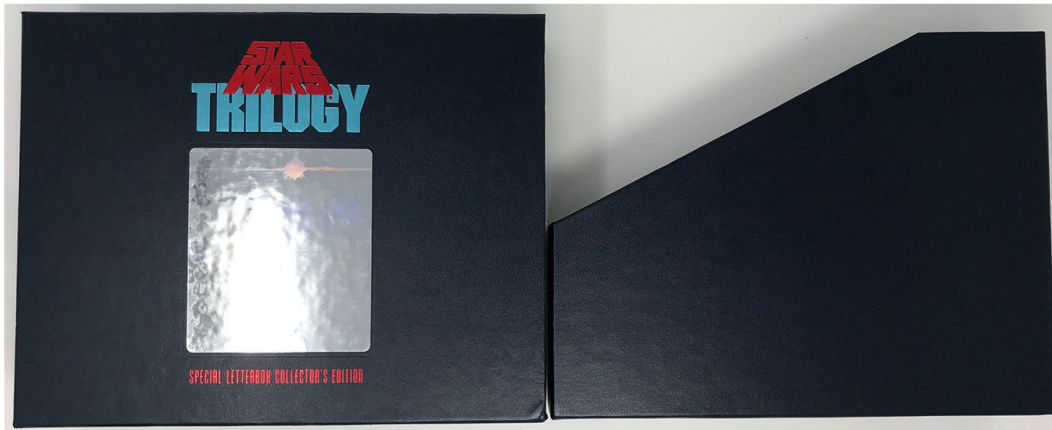


ANH logo placement comparison: 1990 (left) vs. 1992 (right)

Finally, we should note that the VHS cassettes in these sets were also sold individually, rather than making these sets the only way to acquire them. At least some single release copies included a \$5.00 mail-in rebate

offer for fans who also purchased *Fern Gully: The Last Rainforest*.

Alongside this Nov. 1992 full screen reissue of the 1990 VHS set came something that 1990 hadn't seen: the first widescreen version of the trilogy on VHS. This \$100⁷¹ set, known as the *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition* (the very same one noted back in the introduction to this guide) was the first true "collector's set" for the saga on the American market. Rather than another "brick," this set came in a wide case with a foil trilogy logo and a hologram (based on Tom Jung's style A ANH poster) on the front.⁷² The outer cover allowed an inner container to slip out via its right end. Inside the container were four VHS cassettes in individual cases. The first three were the widescreen films, transferred from their 1989 – 1990 *Special Widescreen Collection* LaserDiscs, without trailers before the movies and with an added note about how letterbox format's black "bars" were normal. (Unfortunately, this does mean that ANH had the aspect ratio issues of the 1989 – 1992 LaserDiscs.) Each package and cassette label was identical to its counterpart in the 1992 full screen boxed set, except for a small section at the top denoting it as part of the *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition*. The fourth cassette was *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* in its individual 1992 packaging⁷³ with the exception of a similar label at the top, though only noting it as a *Special Collector's Edition* (sans *Letterbox*).



The Original Trilogy: Special Letterbox Collector's Edition (VHS, 1992):
outer (left) and inner (right) packaging

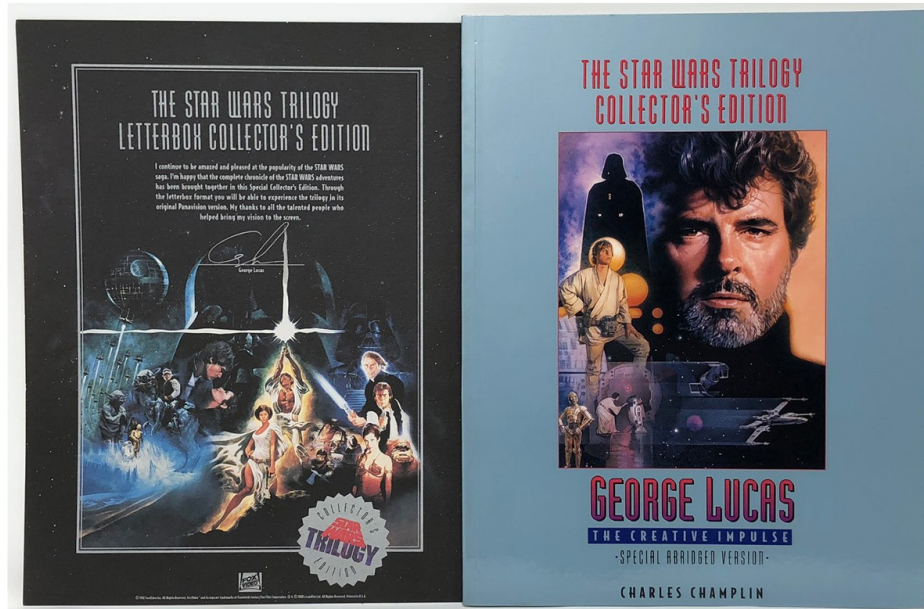
⁷¹ In 2020, that would have been a little over \$180.

⁷² Remember, this was the 1990s. Holograms were *everywhere*.

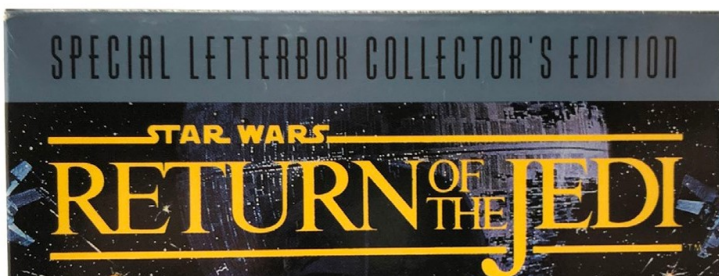
⁷³ As previously noted, see the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III* for more information on *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*.



ANH, TESB, ROTJ, and *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* included within the *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition*



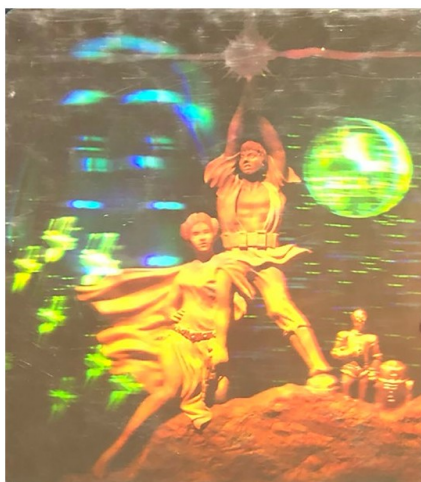
Certificate of authenticity with message from George Lucas (left);
George Lucas: The Creative Impulse: Special Abridged Edition (right)



Special Letterbox Collector's Edition case front label (ROTJ)



Spine label (ROTJ)



Hologram on front of box (based on Tom Jung's style A poster art)

The set also included a certificate of authenticity (COA) with a message from George Lucas, along with a paperback “Special Abridged Version” of *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse* by Charles Champlin (Sept. 1992), featuring the sections specifically addressing the *Star Wars* films. (Home video fans had not seen the last of this book.) Even decades later, many fans still consider this set the pinnacle of *Star Wars* on VHS in America, sometimes even on American home video altogether (though other contenders probably have a stronger claim to that title).



Label comparison (left to right): 1990; 1992 (full screen); 1992 (widescreen)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1991)

In 1991, during the gap between the American full screen VHS releases in 1990 and the first American widescreen VHS release in 1992, the United Kingdom beat the U.S. in bringing a widescreen VHS version of the films to market. These were simple, single film releases, rather than a fancy boxed set with extra goodies like the American *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition*,

but they would be collected into their own no-frills boxed set in 1992.

Cover art featured the typical Tom Jung style A ANH poster art and Roger Kastel TESB style A poster art, but ROTJ used the less common style A poster art by Tim Reamer (but flipped horizontally so the “swoosh” of the blade was on the right instead of the left, as was the planet in the background).



The Original Trilogy (UK VHS, 1991)

Meanwhile in Japan (1991)

In 1991, during the gap between the American releases of the 1990 and 1992 *Original Trilogy* boxed sets, Japan released the entire trilogy on Video8 as part of their *Best Library* product line. While the UK had seen release of the films three years earlier, this was big news for American fans, since Japan used the NTSC format standard. This meant that these releases could be played in American Video8 players (or more often camcorders).

Each film came in its own, clear Video8 case, which resembled a thicker version of what Americans might think of as an audiocassette case. Each film's case had an insert that wrapped around to cover the case's front, back, and one side (the spine), leaving the opposite side (the one that opened) to show the cassette's spine label through it. Covers were somewhat inconsistent, as ANH had the *Star Wars* logo in English with the Japanese title beneath it, TESB had its Japanese title featured prominently with a tiny TESB logo in English to its left, and ROTJ had a prominent Japanese title with the English title in bold but otherwise plain text beneath it. Spine design as also inconsistent, as ANH put its English logo below the Japanese one (when standing upright), while TESB and ROTJ had their English logos above their Japanese titles. Similar inconsistencies (the same odd location and language choices but this time in white against a solid blue

background) were found on the cassettes' labels and spines. Cover artwork used the standard Tom Jung ANH style A poster art, the Japanese TESB style B poster art, and Tim Reamer's ROTJ style A poster art. Each film included English audio with Japanese subtitles.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (Japanese Video8, 1991)



Cassettes with labels



Case spines



Cassette spine labels

These are exceptionally rare today, just like their counterparts from the

United Kingdom.

Meanwhile in Australia (1992)

In Australia, 1992 saw an *Original Trilogy* VHS set in packaging loosely based on the same design as that seen in America in 1990 and 1992. However, since Australia used clear clamshell cases for their VHS cassettes, similar to the UK approach, this boxed set was redesigned to accommodate that reality. As a result, there was no inner case at all. Instead, the slipcover was altered to fit all three clamshell cases when loaded from the side, rather than from the bottom. This resulted in a significantly larger package, measuring 4.88 in. x 8.38 in. x 3.88 in., while its American counterpart only measured 4.5 in. x 7.56 in. x 3.56 in. This change to the size of the slipcover also led to the artwork wrapping around slightly differently on each face. This set can be easily spotted also due to its Fox Video logo being in white, rather than purple, on the side of the slipcover.



The Original Trilogy (Australian VHS, 1992)



Slipcover size and side comparison:
 Australian (left) vs. U.S. (right) –
 Notice the slightly different
 alignment of images as they wrapped
 around the packages, the significant
 height difference, and the different
 colors for the Fox Video logo.

Time Compressed LaserDiscs... One Last Time (1992)

With all of the excitement over the VHS developments in 1992, one set of releases tended to get lost in the shuffle that year. With a huge, game-changing, THX remastered boxed set coming on widescreen, CAV standard play LaserDiscs the next year, Fox Video made one final push of full screen *Original Trilogy* LaserDiscs in 1992.

These three individual, CLV extended play, full screen releases were recognizable by the bottom portion of their jackets being black, rather than the traditional blue. Each included the Fox Video logo in the middle of that black region, along with “Stereo Extended Play” and an additional “Digital Sound” notation. Unfortunately, despite uncompressed versions of ANH and TESB existing on CAV LaserDiscs seven years earlier, the CLV discs for those two films were once again time compressed for this release.

For variant hunters, there were two slightly different jackets for the ROTJ release from this line. The film's logo was silver on one but white on the other. (The white logo matched the logos on the other two films, making the silver logo the oddball.)

This set was an important moment for *Star Wars* on LaserDisc, as it marked the last time that the films would be released in full screen on the format. It was also the last time the films would be time compressed on *any* American format.



ANH (LaserDisc, 1992)



TESB (LaserDisc, 1992)



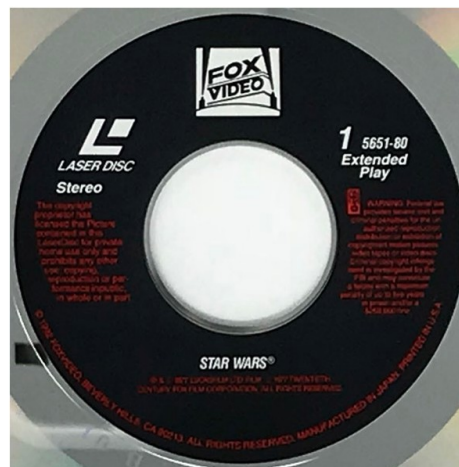
ROTJ (LaserDisc, 1992) – silver logo



ROTJ (LaserDisc, 1992) – white logo



ROTJ logo comparison: silver (left) vs. white (right)



Disc label (ANH)

Conclusion: First Steps and Growing Pains

If *Star Wars* home video in the era of 1982 – 1992 had to be given a label, one might call it the saga's first steps or perhaps its growing pains. Each seems to capture the feeling one gets when delving into this era, moving between shelves or stacks of VHS or Beta cassettes, big ol' LaserDiscs, or those heavy floppy-disk-looking things (oh, right, CEDs).

On the one hand, we see events that were remarkable for their day: rental versions sold illegally in what could only have been record numbers at the time; an effort to improve audio quality for subsequent releases; and eventually a move to put widescreen versions of the films into homes in an era when most audiences would complain that they were *missing* part of the

picture by watching a letterboxed film, rather than realizing that they had actually *regained* about 1/3 of what they had seen in the movie theater.

On the other hand, this was an era so caught up in the Format War⁷⁴ that it was difficult to know where to place one's bets. Should a fan invest in VHS copies of the films or Beta? Was there enough benefit in terms of the viewing experience to make the jump to LaserDisc? Seriously, what was that huge blue (or white) thing? (Oh, right, a CED!)

Fortunately, by 1992, at least some of those issues had sorted themselves out as CED and then Beta fell by the wayside. Still, the question remained as to which would win the broader Format War: VHS or LaserDisc?

⁷⁴ We should perhaps call this the *First* Format War or the *Great* Format War (hence the title of this chapter), as we will soon see that there was another format war in more recent memory in which *Star Wars* did not participate until the outcome was already decided. See the chapters *The Lucas Films in HD* (later this volume) and *Rewriting the Clone Wars* (in *Volume III*).

3 THE ORIGINAL... ONE LAST TIME

(1993 – 1995)

George Lucas is a visionary and a tinkerer, a filmmaker always striving to push cinema forward. During the development of the *Original Trilogy*, groups, divisions, and technologies he set in motion became some of the most recognized names in film: Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), Skywalker Sound, and Pixar, to name a few. With SoundDroid and EditDroid, Lucasfilm pioneered non-linear editing. Digital effects, shooting, and editing were advanced considerably by the *Prequel Trilogy*. Even digital picture manipulation in Adobe Photoshop⁷⁵ owes itself to the minds of those involved in the *Star Wars* films.

One of Lucas' achievements in filmmaking was to raise the bar for theatrical picture and sound with the THX sound system standard and THX mastering of movies. The THX quality assurance standard had been originally developed by Lucasfilm's Tomlinson Holman, whose name had given birth to the "THX" moniker, which stood for either "Tomlinson Holman's Crossover" (using the X as "cross" as in many translations of Japanese material today) or "Tomlinson Holman's Experiment" (with the X highlighted from "experiment"). It became the foundation for THX Ltd. when the company was founded by Lucas and Holman in 1983.⁷⁶ Given

⁷⁵ Photoshop was developed by Thomas Knoll and brother John Knoll, the latter of *Star Wars* fame and the man whose story pitch decades later essentially became *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

⁷⁶ THX Ltd. was later acquired by Creative Technology Ltd. in 2002 and then by

Lucas' penchant for returning to tweak his films (something not yet evident in the early 1990s), it should not surprise a modern fan that one of Lucas' pet projects with THX remastering of existing movies was a full restoration and remastering of the *Star Wars* films.

America's Definitive Collection (1993)

The first home video release to present this new update of the *Original Trilogy* with improved picture quality and a sound mix remastered from original elements was *not* the one usually brought to mind when someone mentions the names *Star Wars* and THX.

The release came in Sept. 1993 and was not billed as a "THX Remastered Edition," even though that is precisely what it was. This was *The Definitive Collection*, a massive, nine-disc, CAV standard play, widescreen (letterboxed) LaserDisc set, the single heaviest *Star Wars* home video boxed set ever to hit the American market.⁷⁷ This enormous set came in a black and silver case with a flap over its opening that was secured through Velcro⁷⁸. The films inside were each in individual jackets and consisted of three CAV discs (without time compression) each. Disc labels were mostly monochromatic in mauve (ANH), light blue (TESB), and what I like to call "baby vomit green" (ROTJ). Alongside the discs was a program booklet with information about the set, chapter listings, and the locations of bonus content on the discs. The set also included a full 1992 hardback copy of *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*, rather than an abridged version as in the previous year's premium VHS set. (Strangely, the book did not include its dust jacket, which was present on regular retail copies and the copy found in a nearly identical Japanese release of this set in 1994.)

The THX remastering process meant that these were entirely new masters for home video releases, which allowed the aspect ratio and letterboxing issues of the previous widescreen releases to become things of

Razer Inc. in 2016, making it one of the companies born from Lucasfilm that were not among the assets acquired when Lucasfilm was sold to Walt Disney Company.

⁷⁷ The *20th Century Fox 75th Anniversary Collection* was actually a tiny bit heavier, while the *AFI Century Collection* was *far* heavier, but those weren't *Star Wars* releases, per se, just products that happened to include a copy of ANH (on DVD and VHS, respectively).

⁷⁸ It was the 1990s. Of course it was Velcro!

the past.⁷⁹ The audio mix (using Dolby Surround, providing four-channel audio with a Dolby Pro Logic decoder⁸⁰) was also only subtly altered from previous releases, more cleaned up than tweaked, making this set live up to its name as the definitive set of its time.

Each film featured bonus material, something that blew the minds of fans used to VHS, a format at this point usually bereft of extra content outside of the occasional trailer. The films included audio commentary segments at various points of interest throughout the films (not the entire films). The commentary segments, which could be found on the discs' analog audio tracks, included thoughts from George Lucas (on all but ROTJ), Ken Ralston, Ralph McQuarrie, Frank Oz (TESB only), and Dennis Muren. On the sides containing the finales of ANH and TESB, trailers could be found for each film. (For TESB, more trailers carried over onto the reverse side of that disc, while ROTJ's were all pushed to the reverse due to the film's extra length compared to the prior episodes.) The final side of each film (the reverse of the third disc, also referred to as "side 6") included what was, for this era, a breathtaking array of supplemental material.

ANH bonus material included: *War Stories: An Interview with George Lucas* (excerpted from interviews in 1992 – 1993); segments on the film's original concepts, writing, aerial dogfights, characters (C-3PO and Darth Vader), and actors (Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher); a gallery of Ralph McQuarrie's artwork with the artist himself narrating; numerous sections of still photographs (behind-the-scenes, special effects, and a look "behind the music"); and *A Tour of the Lucasfilm Archives* (hosted by archivist Don Beis and R2-D2).

TESB bonus features included: *Sound Advice: An Interview with Ben Burtt* and several further featurettes on sound design; *How Walkers Walk* (stop motion workshop footage narrated by Dennis Muren); numerous still galleries (concept art, behind-the-scenes, and special effects); and two segments on the asteroid chase (a comparison of the storyboards to the actual film, then a separate section where storyboards were shown at full-screen size to allow the details and instructions for photography to be seen

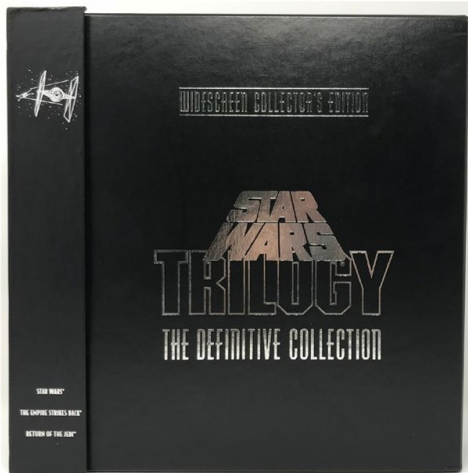
⁷⁹ To be fair, this was the same year that Technidisc took over producing the Fox Video version of the *Special Widescreen Edition* of ANH, so that was actually fixed around the same time already. See the previous chapter for details.

⁸⁰ We will dig a bit into what this means when we see the saga's first Dolby Digital 5.1 release next chapter.

clearly).

ROTJ bonus features (all on the final side, including the aforementioned trailers) included: *The ABCs of Jedi Effects: An Interview with Dennis Muren*; *Jedi Videomatics* (a moving storyboard narrated by Ken Ralston); other small special effects features; the “Lapti Nek” music video; and still photograph galleries (concept art, behind-the-scenes, and special effects).

I should note (because it will matter when we consider the Japanese versions of this set) that when playing bonus content on side 6 for each film, both the digital and analog audio tracks were in English. Also, when viewing the other five sides of each film, the film’s audio was provided on the digital audio track (left and right channels), while both left and right analog channels were used for the commentaries, allowing them to be heard in analog stereo.



The Definitive Collection (LaserDisc, 1993)



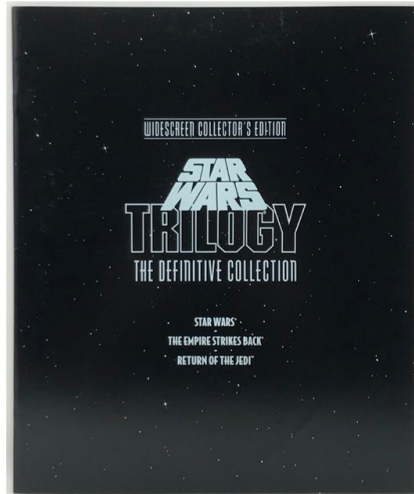
Individual film jacket (ANH)



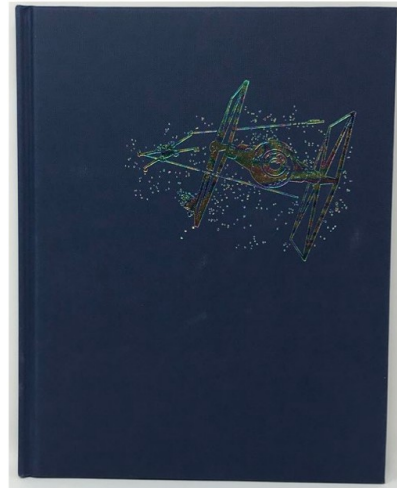
Individual disc jacket



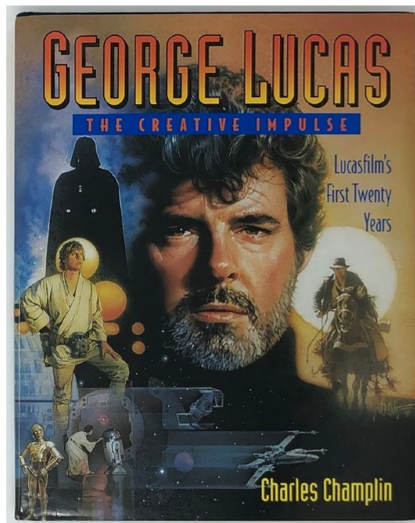
Disc label (ANH)



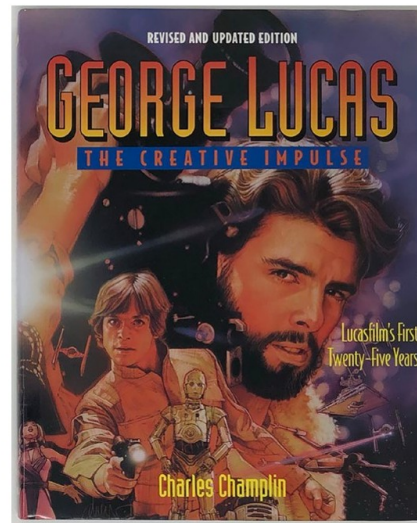
Guide to disc content



George Lucas: The Creative Impulse



George Lucas: The Creative Impulse (1992)
retail release (for comparison)



George Lucas: The Creative Impulse (1997)
retail release (for comparison)

The set was a masterpiece for its time, presenting enthralling extras rarely seen outside of separate “making of” books or TV specials, the most impressive picture and sound quality for any *Star Wars* release up to that point, and a full-length book for good measure.

Forever Tinkering: THX Remastering (1993)

One can actually see a noticeable difference in the color and crispness of the THX remastered films when compared against their previous home video releases. The same can be said for the clarity of the audio.

Ironically, one (hilarious) flaw crept into this set that actually undid something previously praised for being fixed. The C-3PO line missing from

the early home video releases, which had been reinserted during the digital mastering process in 1985 and made its way to home video in 1986, was missing *again*. It would take the *Special Edition* of ANH in 1997, which had its audio remastered once more, for the line to finally return (and then remain through the 2004, 2011, and 2019 updates to the film).

That is not to say that this set did not have its share of issues. Each film had some relatively minor technical issues, some of which were fixed on subsequent pressings. Other issues, especially with the content guide booklet's information, remained erroneous even when discs were fixed.

The guide booklet was most frequently inaccurate for ANH. Side 2 of ANH included a commentary track on chapter 18 that the content guide booklet listed as chapter 19. The booklet also claimed that side 5 of ANH had commentary from both Dennis Muren and Ken Ralston on chapter 2, when it was actually Muren on chapter 1 and Ralston on chapter 2. The worst error was that the booklet listed a commentary with George Lucas discussing mythology in *Star Wars* as located during chapter 19 on side 4, when it was really on side 2, chapter 21, which was not just the wrong chapter but the wrong disc entirely!

For TESB, the booklet's issues were minor, limited to incorrectly claiming that side 4 had commentaries on chapters 16 and 17 when they were really on 17 and 18. However, it was a disc content issue that plagued TESB. The original pressing of this set lacked about seven seconds at the beginning of side 3 that showed Leia welding aboard the *Millennium Falcon*, leading Fox Video to offer a replacement disc for those who requested one. This was fixed for subsequent pressings.

For ROTJ, the booklet was accurate for those with a first pressing, but it seems that some pressings (apparently later ones) lost a commentary that was found on early pressings. This was a commentary about "more and bigger explosions" for the Death Star battle, found on side 5, chapter 13, for some pressings but entirely missing from others.⁸¹ (It was listed in the

⁸¹ I have two sets of these discs, both from later pressings, so that the missing seconds of TESB have been restored. However, neither has the commentary for ROTJ side 5, chapter 13. I have spoken with other collectors who have earlier pressings (missing the seconds on TESB side 3) that *do* include the commentary for ROTJ side 5, chapter 13. That (and something we will see in Japan) makes me believe that when the discs were all updated for subsequent pressings to remove minor issues, the ROTJ commentary was lost.

content guide booklet regardless.)

Still, despite these minor issues (and the possible need for a replacement disc), the set remained exceptionally strong overall. Of course, one pays for high quality. *The Definitive Collection* retailed for a whopping \$250 (the equivalent of over \$440 in 2020). Soon, though, fans would have a more inexpensive way to view these enhanced versions of the films, though the excellent bonus features would not make the transition.

Meanwhile in France (1994)

The year after America saw its *Definitive Collection*, France saw its own fancy boxed set of the trilogy on LaserDisc, but it was not equivalent to the *Definitive Collection*. Instead, this was a limited, individually numbered, *Collector's Edition* that included four CLV extended play discs.

Each film was letterboxed widescreen and dubbed in French. The first disc contained ANH across both of its sides and was an improved pressing from 1994 of a disc originally released in 1989. The second disc contained TESB, which was also a better 1994 pressing of an earlier release (1990). The third and fourth discs used their first three sides to present ROTJ, using an identical master to a previous release (1990). The second side of the final disc was not blank, however. It included *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*. Disc labels were plain blue with white text.



The Original Trilogy: Collector's Edition
(French LaserDisc, 1994)



ANH jacket



TESB jacket



ROTJ jacket

Each film's disc(s) came in a jacket for that specific film, which used the familiar style A poster art for ANH and TESB, along with style B poster art for ROTJ. Poster art was presented in a rectangular area (with the title in French) that was surrounded by a blue border. That border was broken on all four sides of the rectangular poster art by art of a LaserDisc surface, providing a design reminiscent of a blue jacket with a LaserDisc stacked on top of it, then the poster art, slightly smaller, stacked atop the LaserDisc. The jacket for ROTJ, which needed to hold two discs, folded open to present a large shot of Darth Vader with Moff Tiaan Jerjerrod aboard the second Death Star, along with small images of Salacious B. Crumb, Leia with Wicket, and (in a case of an image being used from the wrong film) the *Millennium Falcon* on the Cloud City landing pad as Lando and his team approached Han in TESB.

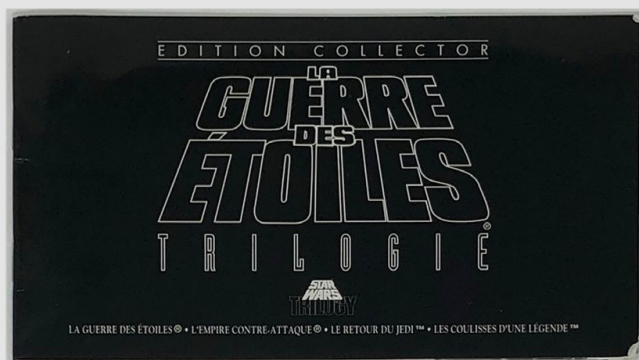
The discs came with a small booklet of saga information (in French) inside a massive, black, package with silver art and lettering. The cover included the package's logo, the names of the programs it included, various other logos, and the individual copy's number from the limited edition. (Alas, I have yet to be able to confirm exactly how many of these were produced.)

The design of the packaging was unfortunate, as it was easily damaged with even moderate use. It resembled a truncated square pyramid (a square base with sloping sides but which quickly cut off so that the top was flat but smaller in area than the bottom). Removing the contents required shifting an inner section (made of the container for the jackets and the front and back sides of the pyramid AKA the sides on the top and bottom of the cover when viewed from the top) out of an outer section (made of the top surface, bottom surface, and right and left sides of the pyramid). Corners of this thick, cardboard packaging often caught against each other,

making tears and other damage commonplace. (It was also a bit awkward to store, as it could not easily rest on its edge, only sit flat.)

Odd as it was, this was a way for French fans to view the films in their own language *and* receive a great behind-the-scenes special as a bonus.

But it was no *Definitive Collection*.



Booklet



Label



ROTJ jacket (open) – Notice the image from TESB at the top right.

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1994)

In the United States, we tend to think of 1994 as a “dead” year for *Star Wars* home video. It was the “gap” year between the 1993 *Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set and the *THX Remastered Edition* releases with their enormous “one last time” marketing push. However, 1994 was an important year for *Star Wars* home video in the United Kingdom, and what occurred there had a direct impact on the U.S. and elsewhere in 1995.

With the success of *The Definitive Collection* in the U.S. in 1993, Simon Hewlett, Fox Video's director of sales for the UK, made an important observation. The *Star Wars* films had remained in the top 100 on UK VHS

sales charts for years, week after week. Granted, they tended to be fairly low on those top 100 charts, but their appeal had kept them among the top 100 without much, if any, promotion whatsoever. It was the enduring appeal of the films that kept them in demand. So what might happen if Fox Video actually put a major marketing push behind a new *Star Wars* release? If the logic held, it would be phenomenally successful.⁸²

The result of this epiphany was a PAL transfer of the *Original Trilogy* from the same masters used for *The Definitive Collection*. That transfer was then used as the basis for a release of all three films in both full screen and widescreen. This release received a huge marketing effort from Fox Video, resulting in great success: over 1.1 million units sold in just a little over three months, a number only surpassed in the UK at the time by (ironically in retrospect) Disney films.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (UK VHS, 1994) – full screen

These were available in both full screen and widescreen. Full screen copies featured poster art (style A by Tom Jung and Roger Kastel for ANH and TESB but the 1985 re-release version by Jung for ROTJ) with the term “Digitally Remastered” above a silver title. The widescreen releases also used poster art (style C by Thomas Chantrell for ANH, foreign style A by Noriyoshi Ohrai for TESB, and the reworked *Revenge of the Jedi* teaser art by Drew Struzan for ROTJ in which Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader have

⁸² UK media website *The Raygun* (theraygun.co.uk) had a great series of articles on the subject of the 1994 – 1995 UK releases, as told by former Fox executive Steve Collins, that they posted in Aug. – Sept. 2015. I highly recommend them. At the time of this guide’s publication, they remain available in the website’s archives.

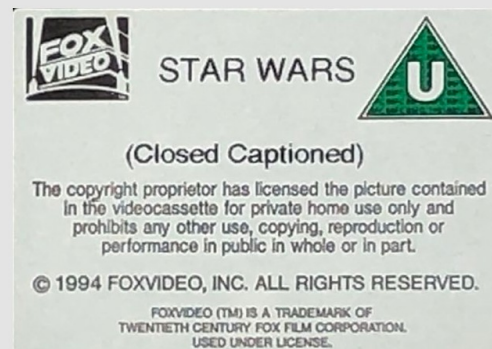
the wrong lightsaber colors) with “Digitally Remastered” above a silver logo, but cases were also labeled *Special Widescreen Edition*⁸³ between the logo and “Digitally Remastered” label. Cassette labels were plain white with black text, a black and white Fox Video label, the color UK rating symbol, and a note that the cassette’s content was closed captioned.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (UK VHS, 1994) – widescreen



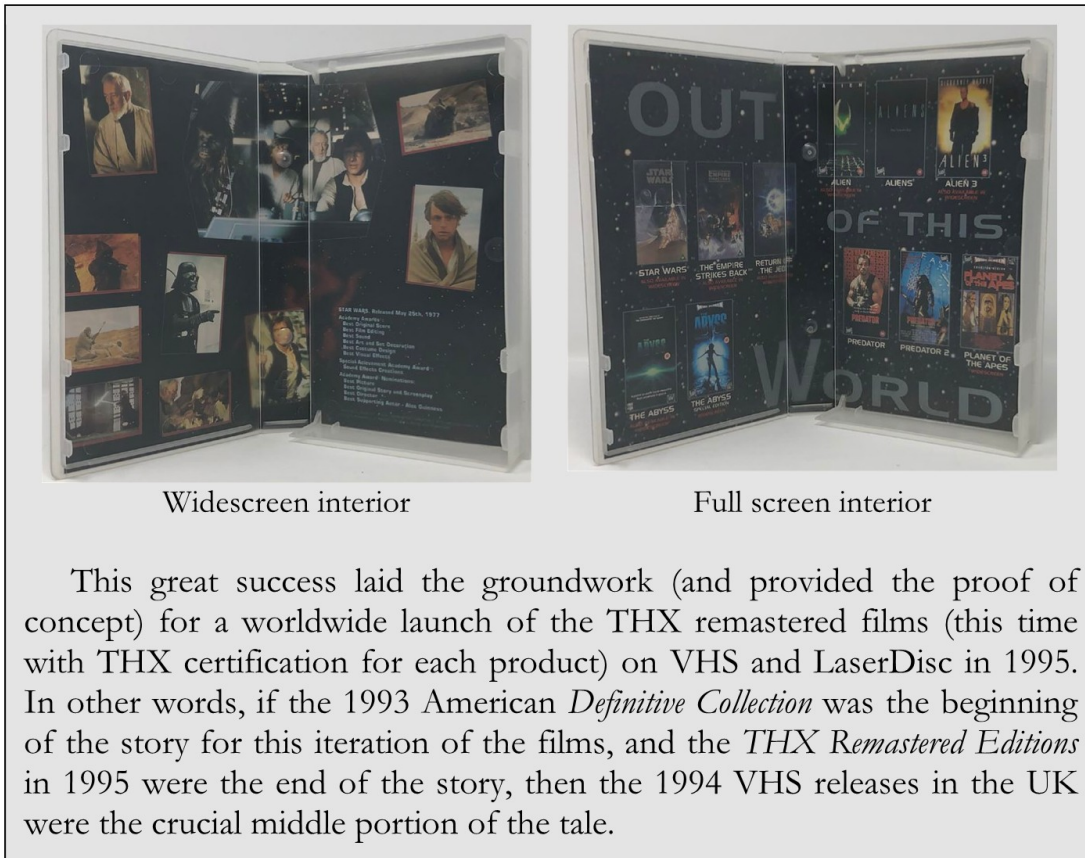
Widescreen label



Full screen label

These releases also provided nice examples of how clear clamshell cases could allow content on the interior side of case art inserts. In this case, the Widescreen version used the interior side of art inserts to provide images from the film itself, while the full screen version took the opportunity to advertise these and other releases.

⁸³ Not to be confused with the American LaserDisc line of the same name.

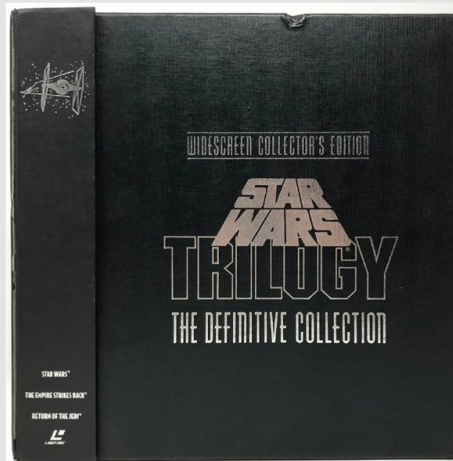


This great success laid the groundwork (and provided the proof of concept) for a worldwide launch of the THX remastered films (this time with THX certification for each product) on VHS and LaserDisc in 1995. In other words, if the 1993 American *Definitive Collection* was the beginning of the story for this iteration of the films, and the *THX Remastered Editions* in 1995 were the end of the story, then the 1994 VHS releases in the UK were the crucial middle portion of the tale.

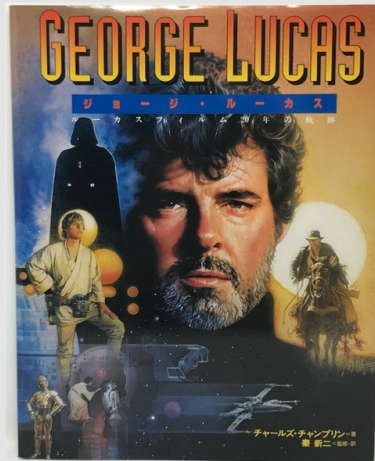
Meanwhile in Japan (1994)

In Japan, *The Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set did not arrive until 1994. When it did, it contained almost identical contents (with Japanese text where necessary, of course). The most obvious physical difference for collectors was that this version *did* include the Japanese dust jacket for *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*, while the U.S. version did not include a dust jacket at all.

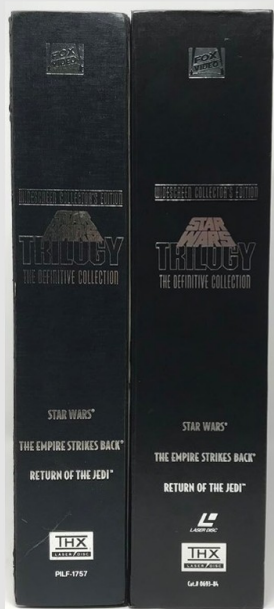
A few minor physical differences included the logo for *The Definitive Collection* appearing on the top of the Japanese packaging, while absent from the American release's top panel. The "flap" edge, which included a LaserDisc logo on the U.S. version, lacked the logo for the Japanese release. As one might expect, the product numbers also differed.



The Definitive Collection
(Japanese LaserDisc, 1994)

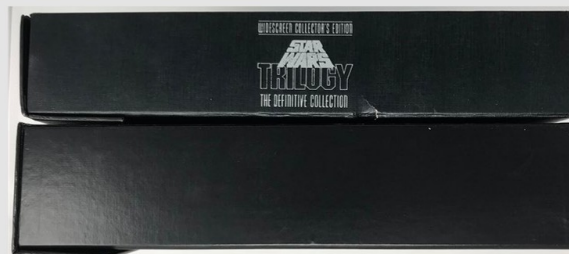


George Lucas: The Creative Impulse
(Japanese version, 1992)



Flap comparison: Japanese 1994 release
(left) vs. U.S. 1993 release (right)

Top comparison: Japanese 1994
release (top) vs. U.S. 1993 release
(bottom)



This set appears to have been made using the updated source discs from later pressings of the American 1993 set, as Ken Ralston's commentary about "more and bigger explosions" was missing from ROTJ side 5, chapter 13, even though it was listed in the content guide (which was

mostly Japanese), just like in some later pressings in the U.S.

All four of Dennis Muren's commentaries from ROTJ sides 3 and 4 were missing (making side 3 the only one with no commentaries at all, while side 4 retained its Ken Ralston commentaries). Furthermore, George Lucas' comments about mythology in *Star Wars*, which the American set erroneously listed as on ANH side 4 when actually on side 2, were entirely missing from the Japanese set. The guide booklet correctly reflected these five omissions. The content guide also did not list Ken Ralston's commentary on the final starship sequence of TEB (side 5, chapter 13), but the commentary was indeed present. On the other hand, the guide listed commentary on the creation of the rancor as being on ROTJ side 1, but the actual commentary did not exist on the disc.

The issues the American set had with some ANH and TEB commentaries being incorrectly listed for chapters right before or after their real locations were all fixed for this Japanese release.

The approach taken to audio tracks was also different for this release, as one might expect. Whereas the American version in 1993 used the digital track for the film's audio and both analog channels (left and right) for commentary, this set divided the analog audio to use the left channel for a low volume version of the film's audio, while the right channel was used for Japanese commentary. Yes, all of the commentary segments that were originally in English were translated into Japanese, so that none of the original speakers were actually heard on this release, just the person reading the Japanese translations of what the team members had said on the American release.

For side 6 of each film, the digital audio was the original English, while the analog audio track carried translated Japanese.

This was not the last time Japan would release *The Definitive Collection*. The next time, just one year later, would have some interesting changes...

The "Faces" Set Arrives (1995)

On Aug. 29, 1995, about two years after the release of *The Definitive Collection* on LaserDisc, its newly improved THX masters were used to produce a new pair (or trio, depending on your point of view) of releases for VHS and a more inexpensive set of releases for LaserDisc.

Known as the *THX Remastered Edition*, the updated films were released in a full screen VHS boxed set (another "brick"), two variants of a widescreen VHS boxed set, and individually on both VHS and LaserDisc. The full screen VHS set had no label to denote it as any kind of new edition, though it now bore the standard THX "digitally mastered for superior sound and picture quality" label along the bottom of the box and the cases of each cassette inside. The outer box, into which all three

cassettes slid from one side, featured Darth Vader's face on both front and spine, while the back bore a message from George Lucas expressing his feelings on being able to present "the final video release of *Star Wars* in its original version... with the best sound and picture quality yet available, thanks to THX digital mastering."⁸⁴

Billed as a chance to "see the original... one last time," the set's individual cassette cases featured most of a character's face and a scene below (earning this set the "faces version" moniker by some fans). ANH featured Vader's face over an X-wing pursuing his TIE Advanced x1 starfighter near the Death Star. TESB featured a stormtrooper face over AT-ATs firing on Rebels during the Battle of Hoth. ROTJ presented Yoda's visage looming over a scene from the film's final duel.



The Original Trilogy: THX Remastered Edition full screen (VHS, 1995)

Like other VHS releases of the films since 1986, this set featured a trailer for itself, but this time, each cassette also included a single bonus feature: one part of a three-part interview between film critic Leonard Maltin and George Lucas, discussing the trilogy.

⁸⁴ At the time, Lucas had announced that he was working on a revised version of ANH, but at this point, no plans had been announced (or perhaps even made) to have TESB and ROTJ undergo the same revision.



Label – same for full screen and widescreen

This 1995 set was also available in widescreen (letterboxed, of course) format as the *THX Widescreen Edition* with two packaging variants. Each featured Vader on the front and Lucas' message on the back, but one was a top-loader (like a shoebox), while the other was a side-loader, similar to the 1992 *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition*. Both contained only the film cassettes in widescreen format without any physical bonus materials (other than "offers"). Strangely, neither the full screen nor widescreen cassette labels (which were again the blue, green, and white style introduced in 1992) noted which version was included on that cassette. Labels were identical.

All three of these VHS releases included an envelope of "special offers," emblazoned with the *Star Wars* logo and the phrase "Special offers inside!" This envelope housed advertisements for Raisin Bran cereal and the Fox Video Movie Club, along with a "savings book" full of coupons for *Star Wars* products (with a cover similar to the ANH VHS case and full screen set's slipcover).



The Original Trilogy: THX Widescreen Edition (VHS, 1995) – top-loader



The Original Trilogy: THX Widescreen Edition (VHS, 1995) – side-loader



Top-loader (interior)



Side-loader (interior)

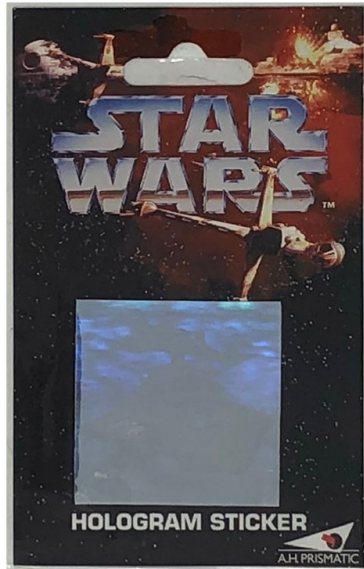


Advertising envelope (top) with contents: Raisin Bran advertisement (middle); Fox Video Movie Club advertisement (bottom left); *Star Wars* savings (i.e. coupon) book (bottom right)

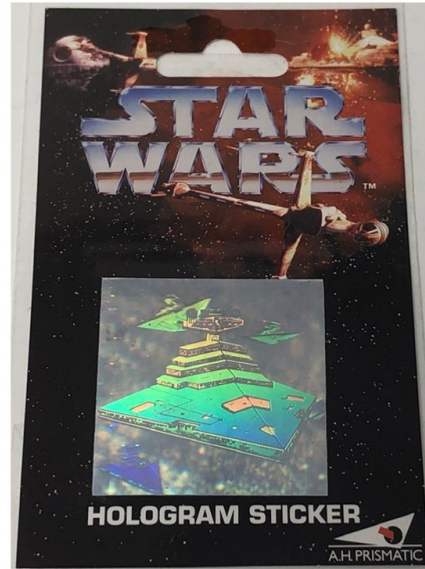
Fans who purchased the *THX Remastered Edition* at Toys “R” Us were provided with a small bonus in the form of a free holographic sticker. In 1994, A.H. Prismatic released a line of *Star Wars* holograms in various product types (stickers, magnets, boxes, etc.). Fans purchasing a VHS release (but, from what I understand, not LaserDisc, as they didn’t seem to carry the format) received what seems to have been a random item from the previous year’s A.H. Prismatic hologram sticker collection.⁸⁵ As this was

⁸⁵ For what it’s worth, the one I own is an Imperial Star Destroyer (as seen in the images), but I have no reason to believe everyone received the same one.

simply a product from an existing collection (and likely a random one at that), it was thankfully not something collectors often felt compelled to seek out.

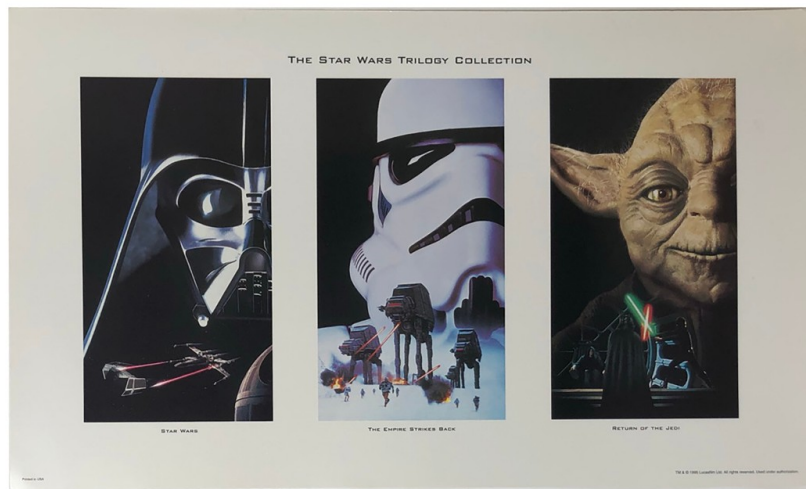


Toys “R” Us hologram sticker bonus item (looking directly at it)



Toys “R” Us hologram sticker bonus item (viewing at an angle)

Another promotional item was made available at Blockbuster, where fans could acquire a 17.5 in. x 11.5 in. lithograph, entitled *The Star Wars Trilogy Collection*, that was essentially just an image of the “virgin” (i.e. no logos or text) artwork for the VHS covers against a white background.



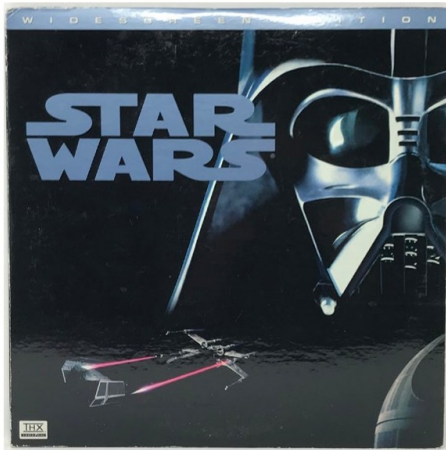
Blockbuster exclusive lithograph

This *THX Remastered Edition* also made its way to LaserDisc (again without any time compression). Unlike *The Definitive Collection*, which had included each film on three CAV standard play discs, these individual film

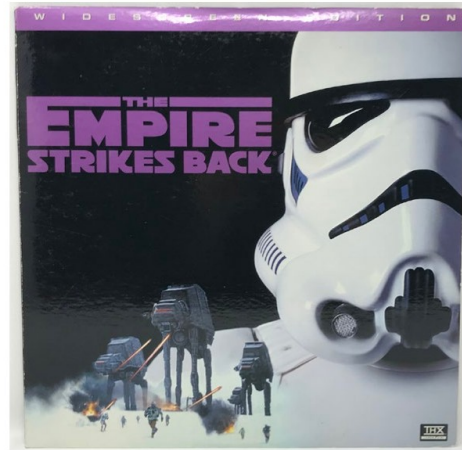
releases were two CLV extended play discs. None of the bonus features from that enormous 1993 set were present, just the same Maltin/Lucas interviews as on their VHS counterparts.

Each individual film was available only in widescreen and came in a gatefold jacket with similar artwork to the VHS “faces” releases (albeit much wider) with a large picture (from the Death Star duel, Battle of Hoth, and space near the Death Star II, respectively), film information, and chapter listings on the inside. Labels were essentially just information, logos, legalese, etc. on a solid color, but the colors had changed from *The Definitive Collection*. ANH was now blue, TESB was purple, and ROTJ was red.

Oddly, there was no boxed set of all three of these LaserDiscs in 1995, which was perhaps an indication of the fading of LaserDisc in the American home video market.



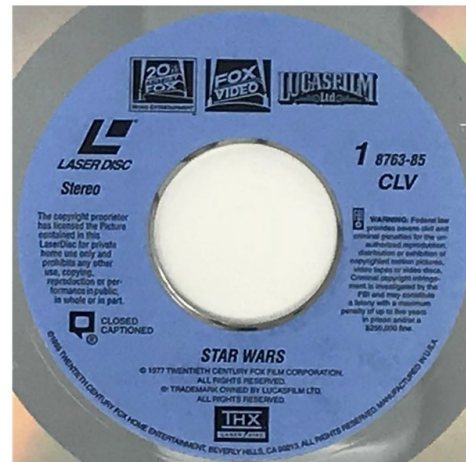
ANH (LaserDisc, 1995)



TESB (LaserDisc, 1995)



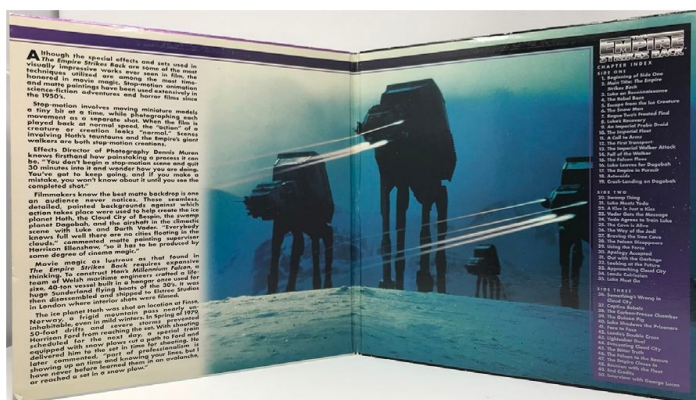
ROTJ (LaserDisc, 1995)



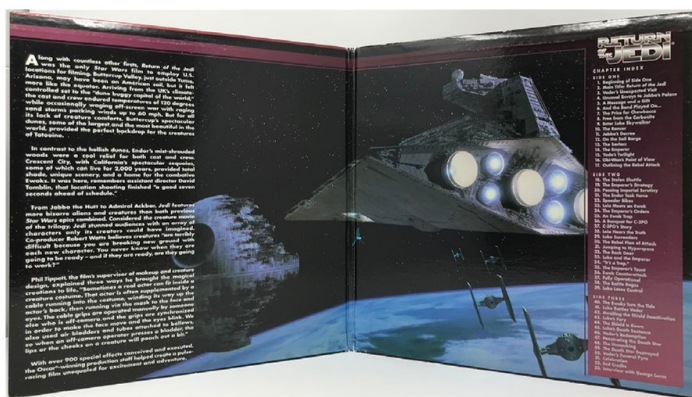
Disc label (ANH)



ANH THX Remastered Edition LaserDisc jacket (open)



TESB *THX Remastered Edition* LaserDisc jacket (open)



ROTJ *THX Remastered Edition* LaserDisc jacket (open)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1995)

The United Kingdom, where the 1994 VHS releases based on the 1993 U.S. *Definitive Collection* LaserDiscs had provided proof that a new release of the *Star Wars* films on home video could be successful if supported by a solid advertising campaign, was also among the many countries where the *THX Remastered Edition* saw release in 1995. Whereas the 1994 VHS releases had been based on the 1993 *Definitive Collection* masters, which themselves

were THX remastered versions of the films, the 1995 releases worldwide were THX certified, giving them a slight edge in quality even over the 1994 releases. The wave of 1995 releases in the UK tends to be remembered for its most elaborate boxed set, *The Definitive Collection*, which was a VHS set, rather than LaserDisc. However, before we dive into that outstanding product, we should take moment to note that there were *four* other *THX Remastered Edition* VHS boxed sets released alongside it, giving the UK two more boxed sets for this wave than the U.S.

Both full screen and widescreen cassettes were available for purchase separately, also like in the American market. All cassette cases featured new artwork commissioned from artist John Alvin for international (but not American) releases of the *THX Remastered Edition*. Each cassette included its segment of the Leonard Maltin interview with George Lucas. Most notably, the widescreen releases had one of the most brilliant (in my opinion) means of differentiating full screen from widescreen of any *Star Wars* release. The lower third of each case's cover featured a screenshot from the film in its widescreen dimensions with the word "widescreen" written above it. (If that didn't get the idea across, nothing would!)

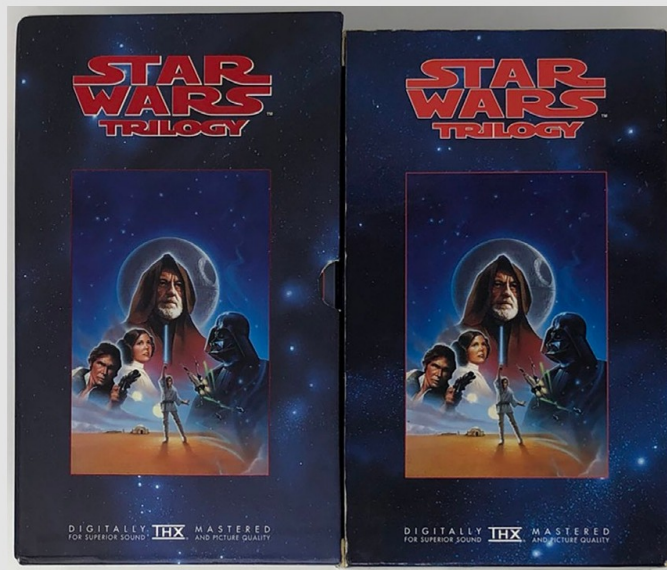


ANH, TESB, and ROTJ full screen (UK VHS, 1995)



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ widescreen (UK VHS, 1995)

The four “regular” boxed sets were all “bricks” and could be divided into two categories: standard and limited edition versions. Both standard versions were full screen and differed only in their outer packaging. The first contained all three films (in their regular, clamshell cases) in a thick cardboard slipcover. The front and back bore John Alvin’s art for ANH and ROTJ (one per side, framed), while the spine included the film titles and Alvin’s TESB artwork (framed). The second standard version had very similar packaging visually, but it was instead a thinner cardboard box that fit around the cassette cases. The front and back were essentially identical to those of the slipcover version, while both of the sides were designed like the slipcover’s spine.



The Original Trilogy (UK VHS, 1995) – standard full screen versions: slipcover (left) and box style (right)

Both of the limited edition “brick” sets used a thick cardboard slipcover. One was full screen like the standard editions, but the other was widescreen. The widescreen set featured artwork of a stormtrooper helmet, while the full screen set featured an image of Vader’s helmet, thus making both limited edition sets at least slightly resemble the art being used in the U.S. (In fact, aside from the helmet-only images on either side of the slipcover, the spine of each bore expanded artwork that was indeed the same as the American cover art of Vader for ANH and the stormtrooper for TESB.)



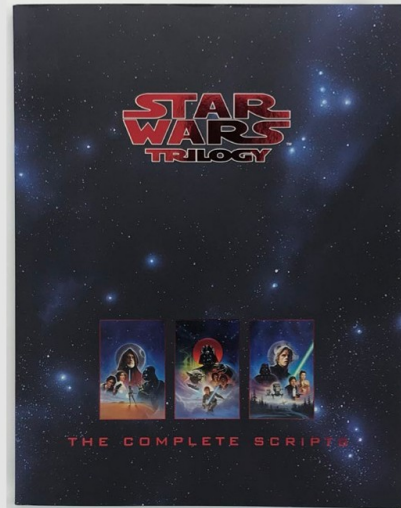
The Original Trilogy (UK VHS, 1995) – limited edition versions:
widescreen (left) and full screen (right)

Visually, these were certainly much nicer releases than those in the U.S., but it was their “big brother” that stole the show...

In the United States, there were some rather nice VHS boxed sets over the years, most notably in 1992 and 1997, but in most home video collectors’ opinions, none of those can hold a candle to the United Kingdom’s outstanding *The Definitive Collection* VHS release in 1995. Often referred to as “the *Executor* set” due to being packaged in a nice tin that looked like cargo bound for the Super Star Destroyer *Executor*, this limited, numbered edition of the *THX Remastered Edition* on VHS was jam packed with physical and video extras. Only 20,000 were available worldwide.



The Definitive Collection (UK VHS, 1995)



The Complete Scripts



Inner cover (placed over contents directly beneath lid)

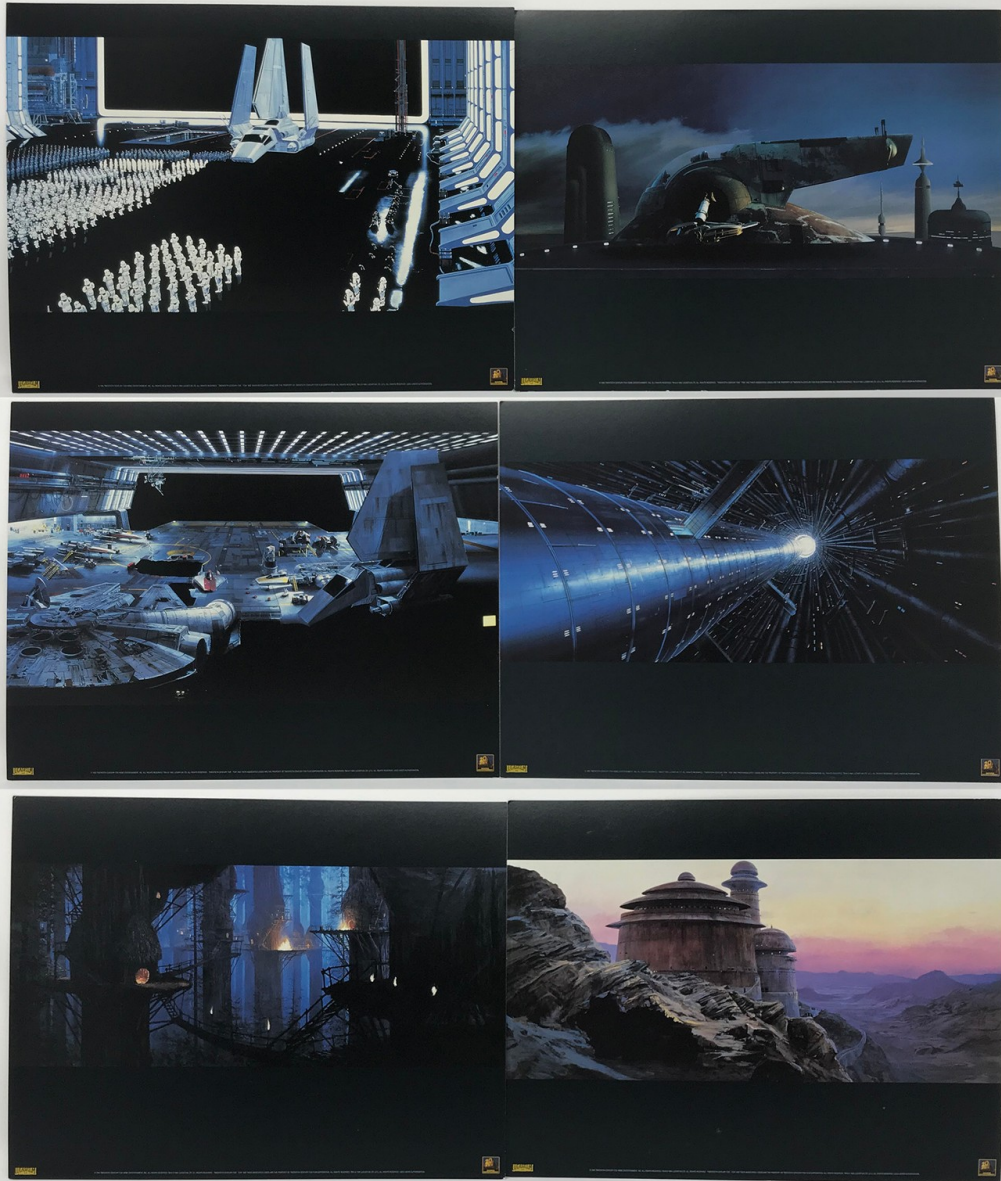


Numbered certificate (left) and content guide (right)

Physically, the set included a folder with its individual number from this limited edition, recreations of six matte paintings (8.5 in. x 11 in.), prints of the John Alvin international artwork for each episode (also 8.5 in. x 11 in.), a paperback book containing all three film scripts (*The Complete Scripts*), a guide to the set's contents, and four VHS cassettes.



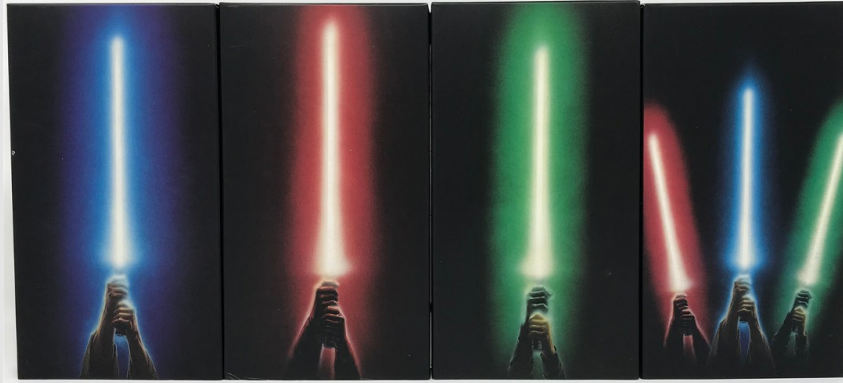
Art prints



Matte painting prints

Each cassette came in a standard, bottom-loading VHS case, emblazoned with one or more ignited lightsabers against a black background for a fancy look. Rather than running in SP, which limited a cassette to about two hours of content, these used an alternate speed setting that allowed a huge amount of bonus content on each cassette. Each film's cassette included the film itself, its classic behind-the-scenes special (*The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2*, *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back*, or *Classic Creatures: Return of the Jedi*), the film's various trailers, and all of the supplemental materials from *The Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set from the U.S. (1993), except the audio commentary segments and still

galleries. The final cassette in the set was *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*, the other major behind-the-scenes program from the era of the *Original Trilogy*'s theatrical run.



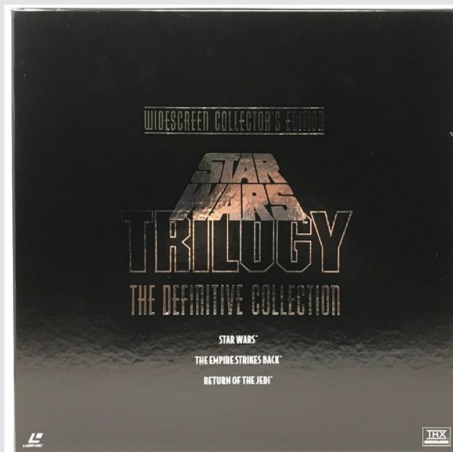
The Definitive Collection VHS cases (left to right): ANH; TESB; ROTJ; *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*

This set put all of its U.S. counterparts to shame and begged the question of why such a package never saw release stateside on VHS.

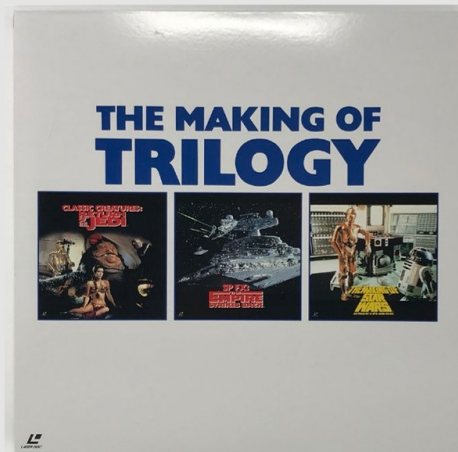
Meanwhile in Japan (1995)

In 1995, a second version of *The Definitive Collection* was released in Japan. This version, presented in a package with a cover that lifted off instead of the older, heavier, side-loading packaging, dropped *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse* and instead included an extra folding LaserDisc jacket labeled *The Making of Trilogy*⁸⁶, which included two CLV extended play discs: one with *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* on one side and *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back* on the reverse; and the other with *Classic Creatures: Return of the Jedi* on one side and a blank reverse side. These “extra” LaserDiscs contained the regular English programs with English audio and Japanese subtitles. No Japanese audio options were included. None of these “making of” discs were listed in the guide booklet. The other nine discs (three per film) were included in simple, white jackets, rather than the fancier black, thematic jackets of 1994.

⁸⁶ This drives me batty. Was it *The “Making of” Trilogy*, like “Making of” was the trilogy’s label, akin to “Original,” “Prequel,” or “Sequel?” Was it supposed to be “*The Making of [the] Trilogy?*” with a missing word (“the”)? Argh!



The Definitive Collection
(Japanese LaserDisc, 1995)



The Making of Trilogy bonus item
(2 discs, including 3 specials)



ANH label comparison: 1994 (left) vs. 1995 (right)

Disc content for the nine “returning” LaserDiscs was almost identical to the 1994 set. This release restored the missing commentary from ROTJ side 5, chapter 13. It also handled analog audio for the films themselves (sides 1 – 5 of each film’s 3 discs) differently than the previous year’s release. While the digital audio was still the original English film audio, the Japanese translated audio commentary was moved from the right analog channel to the left, and rather than including the film’s audio on the remaining channel, this version included the original English commentary (missing from the 1994 release) on that channel. Thus, whereas the 1994 version allowed viewing with Japanese commentary while still hearing the film’s audio at low volume when listening in analog stereo (but completely lacked the original, English commentaries in the team’s own voices), this set created a mess of both English and Japanese when listening in analog stereo but allowed the viewer to choose either English or Japanese commentary

audio by selecting the appropriate individual analog channel.

The guide booklet restored the missing listing for Ken Ralston's commentary from TESB side 5, chapter 13. It also removed the erroneous listing for the rancor commentary from ROTJ side 1 that was present in the U.S. but not on either Japanese release.

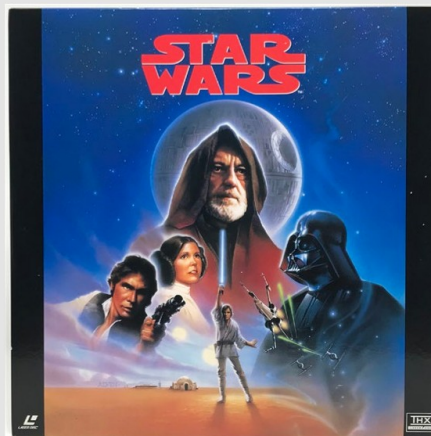
The guide booklet also seemed to suggest that the commentary about Dagobah when Luke crashes into the swamp in his X-wing was missing from this release. It *was* still included, but this was an oddball commentary location. In both Japanese releases and the American version that preceded them, a commentary about the asteroid field began on TESB side 2, chapter 11. That commentary then continued through the beginning of chapter 14. After a brief pause, the commentary about Dagobah then began, still in chapter 14. This merited a separate listing in the U.S. in 1993 and Japan in 1994 but apparently not in Japan in 1995. The listing was gone, but no actual content was lost from the disc.

Visibly, discs could also be identified in this set by the old mauve, blue, and green labels of the 1994 set (and 1993 American set) being replaced by more standard blue and white 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment labels.

Strangely, 1995 also had *another* large, Japanese *Star Wars* LaserDisc boxed set, labeled the *Star Wars Collector's Set*. This set, contained in a plain white box with gold text, included the three *Original Trilogy* films on two widescreen, CLV extended play LaserDiscs each (spread over three of the four sides available). Each film came in a gatefold jacket featuring John Alvin's international artwork. Labels were blue and white (again).



Star Wars Collector's Set
(Japanese LaserDisc, 1995)



ANH disc jacket



TESB disc jacket



ROTJ disc jacket



*From Star Wars to Jedi:
The Making of a Saga*



Disc label (ANH)

The Leonard Maltin interview from the *THX Remastered Edition* was included. As a bonus, this set included a LaserDisc of *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* on a single CLV extended play disc (using both sides), featuring the same “Lucas amid *Star Wars* models” cover art as the 1992 U.S. VHS release. The films and special all included original English audio with Japanese subtitles.

Neither 1995 release had an exact U.S. equivalent.

Meanwhile in Mexico (1995)

As we will see from time to time, media formats did not always emerge or fade away in every region simultaneously. As American consumers, we tend to delude ourselves into thinking that whatever is prevalent over here must surely be dominating elsewhere, or at least when a format dies here, it must have died globally. While sometimes true, that is certainly not a given.

This concept was illustrated in Mexico in 1995. As with most regions, the Mexican market had its own (Spanish-dubbed) equivalent of the *THX Remastered Edition* on VHS, presented in cardboard cases with similar designs to the individual UK releases.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (Mexican VHS, 1995)



Label (ANH)

Nothing surprising there, right? What may surprise many American collectors, though, is what was released alongside the films on VHS. All three films were also released in Mexico on Beta! Yes, the Beta format had survived in Mexico for nearly a decade after the last Beta *Star Wars* release in the United States.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (Mexican Beta, 1995)



Beta cassettes

Cases were nearly identical to their VHS counterparts, just marked as Beta on spines. Inside, elaborate folded cardstock pieces held the smaller Beta cassettes in place, despite the VHS-sized packaging. Labels were printed onto the cassettes for both VHS and Beta, as became common on later American VHS releases. Also of note, this was a mismatched set, as ANH was presented on a blue Beta cassette, while the others were black, something only seen very rarely (e.g. ANH for this era in the Netherlands).

Beta had managed to survive south of the border, while nearly forgotten already by American audiences.

Conclusion: A Simpler Time

Given what was to come just two years after the *THX Remastered Edition*, it is hard not to look back at 1993 – 1995 as a simpler time in *Star Wars* home video.⁸⁷ Like Ben Burtt's updating of *A New Hope* in 1985, the films were being altered primarily with an eye toward not so much adding or changing them in ways that the layman viewer would notice but instead toward improving the viewing experience for these already-classic films. These times would not last, though, and we knew it by 1995. You don't say that we can see the original "one last time" if there isn't something significantly different on the horizon.

⁸⁷ Or as some purist fans might put it, "Before the dark times... Before the *Special Editions*."

4 SEE IT AGAIN... FOR THE FIRST TIME (1997 – 1998)⁸⁸

1996, a year without any new American *Star Wars* film releases on home video, stands as a clear dividing line between eras. For fourteen years, *Star Wars* films had been released in their entirety on home media with few changes. When changes had presented themselves, those changes were in the interest of providing the same films in a “cleaner” way, whether that involved the digital remastering of the ANH audio mix in 1985 or the subsequent overhaul of the entire trilogy for 1993’s *The Definitive Collection*.

Like the advertisements said, though, 1995 had been our chance to see the original *Star Wars* “one last time.” Now, 1997 became our chance to both celebrate the original film’s 20th Anniversary and “see it again... for the first time.”

The Original *Special Editions* and the Final U.S. LaserDiscs (1997)

In a rapid-fire series of theatrical releases⁸⁹, Lucasfilm premiered *The Star Wars Trilogy: Special Edition* (or *Special Edition Trilogy*) in the first quarter of 1997. In an equally rapid turnaround that had never been seen before for *Star Wars* home video releases, the films made the jump from the big screen to the small screen in less than a year. The new products were marketed

⁸⁸ A couple of tangential items fall outside this date range (in 2000 and 2007) but are not strictly *Star Wars* releases.

⁸⁹ ANH, TESB, and ROTJ premiered on Jan. 31, Feb. 21, and Mar. 14, respectively.

under 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (another rebranding, this time replacing Fox Video, starting around 1995 – 1996) and arrived on Aug. 26, 1997, just five months (165 days) after *Return of the Jedi*'s theatrical *Special Edition* premiere. The new releases remained on store shelves for a rather limited 97 days.

The *Special Editions* were George Lucas' "definitive vision" (which we now know always carried an unspoken "at the time"), featuring added scenes, enhanced or replaced special effects, and updated audio mixes that even included new musical numbers.⁹⁰ (The new audio mix also finally brought back C-3PO's missing tractor beam dialogue that had appeared from 1986 – 1992, then vanished again in 1993.)

Our purpose here is not to debate the merits of the changes made for the *Special Editions*. Such debates could fill a book of their own. However, I will present some brief thoughts (see sidebar). What matters for our purposes is not the triumph (or tragedy) that was unveiled in theaters in Jan. – Mar. 1997 but the home versions thereof that arrived in Aug. 1997.

Forever Tinkering:

The Special Editions (1997)

This is always a touchy subject. The version of a *Star Wars* film that a viewer grew up with or first experienced is usually the one to which that individual clings.

Personally, my preferred versions will probably always be the versions I saw on home video most in the late 1980s and early 1990s: *A New Hope* had its subtitle, and few changes had been implemented since the films were in theaters. However, I do find that when I tend to watch the films these days, I will watch on Ultra HD Blu-ray or in 4K on Disney+, multiple iterations into George Lucas tweaking the films, since the sound and picture quality is so much stronger.

That said, what about the specific changes for 1997?

I would argue that the films did not particularly need changing, but most of the changes were either neutral or good in the sense that they brought the films more in line visually with the upcoming prequels (e.g. CGI starfighter combat). I was thrilled at the time to see the restored Jabba scene that had been hinted at in *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga* (even if the sequence was a bit redundant with the Greedo scene). Seeing

⁹⁰ Rest in peace, "Lapti Nek" and "Yub Nub." I will forever think of you when shaping up, working out, or celebrating the love.

Biggs and Luke catching up prior to the Battle of Yavin was also a thrill. And who couldn't get behind a Cloud City that more closely resembled what everyone had pictured it to be over the years?

On the other hand, the new "beak" on the sarlacc, Greedo shooting first (by a wide margin), wampa flailing, and replacement of "Lapti Nek" with "Jedi Rocks" made me want to scratch my eyes out, even in 1997.

This time, though, it at least seemed that Lucas was providing reasons for his changes, whether or not we agreed with those changes (or the reasons behind them). I could respect that.

The films were released on VHS individually or in any of three boxed sets. The two most basic sets were simple, boxed set "bricks" of the three films, either in widescreen or full screen. Both featured a Vader face cover that slipped over the end of a rectangular, side-loading box, which held the actual cassettes in their own covers. The widescreen set featured a silver (or platinum) color scheme and was marked as such, while the full screen set was designed in gold and bore no "full screen" identification, as per typical practice at the time. (This packaging choice of silver for widescreen and gold for full screen would continue for many releases through 2005.) Each individual film's case bore its *Special Edition* poster art, surrounded by either a silver or gold border. Labels were also differentiated by color, either with a silver or gold logo (and in widescreen's case, format notation) against a white background with black legalese and logos beneath.



The Special Edition Trilogy widescreen (VHS, 1997)



The Special Edition Trilogy full screen (VHS, 1997)

Each of the individual VHS cassettes included a short featurette about the major changes made to that particular film, essentially explaining what made these *Special Editions* so special



Label comparison: widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)

Full screen (though not widescreen, from what I can tell) boxed sets also often (but not always) included a small booklet of promotional offers with art that was similar to that of the full screen boxed set itself.

Fans who purchased a VHS set at Walmart were provided with a special mail-away offer. By filling out an offer slip inside Walmart copies of the

boxed sets⁹¹ and providing \$1.25⁹² to cover shipping and handling, fans could receive an exclusive *Star Wars* C-3PO Mini-Action Set. This was a small item, part of Galoob's *Star Wars* line of Micro Machines toys. It consisted of a C-3PO "head" that opened to reveal a tiny scene on the *Tantive IV* with Leia and R2-D2 in the background (built into the "lid" that was the interior surface of C-3PO's faceplate) and a tiny, removable C-3PO that could fit onto a small tab in then foreground (on the "floor" made of the inside surface of the back of C-3PO's head). The toy itself was dated 1996 via a copyright stamp on the back.



Left to right: sticker on Walmart sets that indicated inclusion of the C-3PO mail-away offer; the C-3PO Mini Action Set offer card from within Walmart exclusive copies; advertising/promotion booklet found in most full screen copies

⁹¹ I can confirm this for the full screen set, though I've yet to see a widescreen set with the same offer. I'd expect that it did indeed exist, however.

⁹² That would've been about \$2.02 in 2020 dollars.



C-3PO Mini-Action Set mail-away item (1997) – Walmart exclusive
Left to right: C-3PO figure and head (closed); C-3PO figure and head (open); head opened and C-3PO figure inserted to complete scene for display

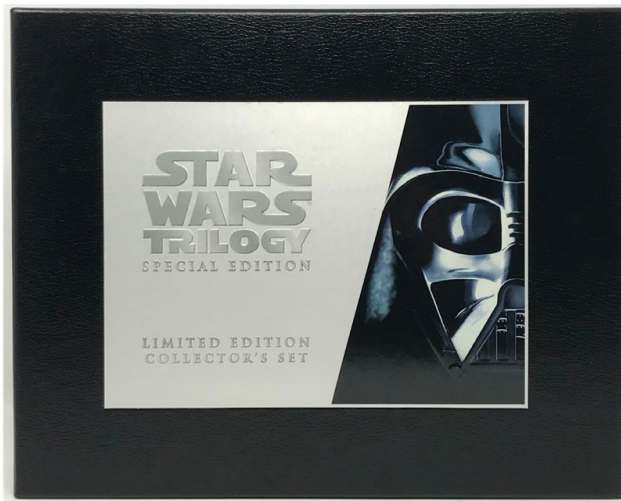
Another promotional item was made available at Blockbuster. Similar to 1995, fans could acquire a thick, cardboard lithograph (17 in. x 11 in.) that was essentially just an image of all three full screen (i.e. gold) VHS covers against a black background.⁹³



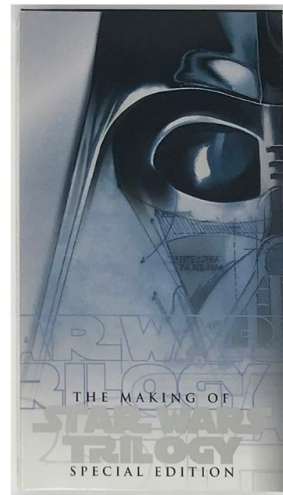
Blockbuster exclusive lithograph (or lobby card)

⁹³ I have seen this described as a lithograph or a lobby card. Call it what you will, it was something fans could acquire from Blockbuster at the time, whether Blockbuster used it for internal advertising also or not.

For those looking for something a bit more high-end, there was the *Limited Edition Collector's Set* in a large, black slipcase. Upon sliding the inner box out of its slipcover (similar to the 1992 *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition*), a first layer of velvety packaging held a pewter paperweight (3 in. x 3 in.) that bore the set's logo on one side and its limited edition number (out of only 40,000 available) on the other.⁹⁴ That top layer of packaging also held an exclusive VHS cassette, entitled *The Making of Star Wars Trilogy: Special Edition*.⁹⁵ This cassette included all three of the behind-the-scenes featurettes that played before the films on the individual releases combined into a single behind-the-scenes video. It featured a Vader face cover, similar to the 1995 reissue of *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2*.⁹⁶



*The Special Edition Trilogy:
Limited Edition Collector's Set (VHS, 1997)*

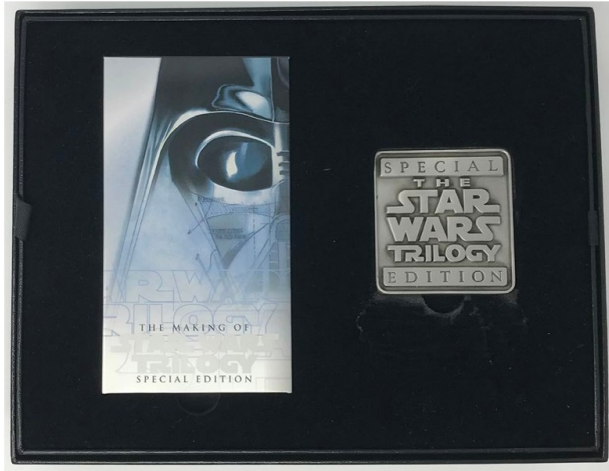


*The Making of Star Wars
Trilogy Special Edition*

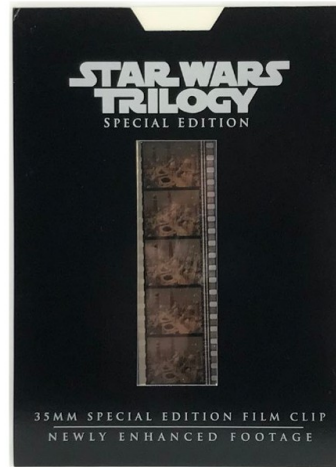
⁹⁴ While nice and hefty, this paperweight has become the bane of fans who love this set. It was so heavy that, if the package was placed on its bottom edge for display, the object's weight caused it to deform and tear the velvet surface around the indentation in which it was held.

⁹⁵ Nope, there wasn't a "the" between "of" and "*Star*."

⁹⁶ See the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III*.



Inner tray holding exclusive VHS and paperweight

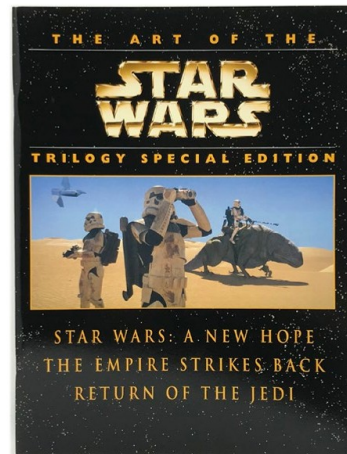


Film clip

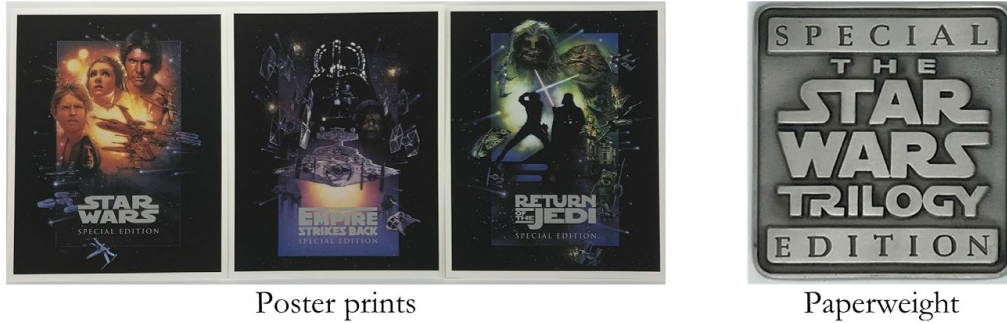
Upon lifting that upper tray from the box, collectors were treated to a folder that contained prints (8 in. x 10 in.) of all three of the *Special Edition* films' theatrical posters, a 35 mm "film clip" from one of the newly enhanced scenes, and a small book entitled *The Art of the Star Wars Trilogy Special Edition* (including segments from each film's reissued *Art of* book). The three films were then found underneath in their standard widescreen packaging and with standard widescreen labels but *without* the now-redundant behind-the-scenes featurettes on the cassettes themselves.



Folder to hold extras



*The Art of the Star Wars
Trilogy Special Edition*



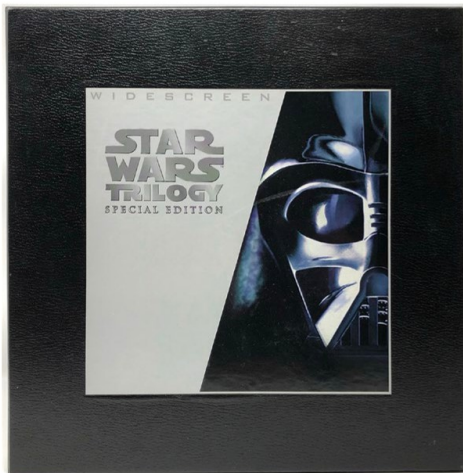
The *Special Edition Trilogy* was also released on LaserDisc in a widescreen boxed set of five mixed CLV and CAV discs. For ANH (sides 1 – 3) and TESB (sides 4 – 6), the first two sides were CLV, while the epic finale was CAV. Each included a trailer for the film after the film ended. For ROTJ (sides 7 – 9), all sides were CLV, but the final side⁹⁷ included not only a trailer for the *Special Edition* of ROTJ but also featurettes about the new changes (similar to those on the VHS release). A nice fold-out insert was also included that discussed the *Special Editions* and provided chapter information. There were no individual film releases to coincide with this boxed set.

This set was also notable as the first *Star Wars* release to use Dolby Digital 5.1 audio. It is perhaps useful to take a moment to consider what the numerical designations mean when we're discussing *Star Wars* audio options and developments. Monaural (often referred to as “mono”) sound presented a single channel of audio, so if using a stereo, two-speaker setup in the early days of *Star Wars* home video releases, using a mono audio setup meant that both speakers (if there were two in use) would provide identical audio. What we might call “regular” stereo sound was simply two channels (left and right) that played from corresponding left and right speakers in front of the viewer. Typically, the number of speakers in a given audio setup was used to identify the setup (e.g. two speakers was 2.0, five speakers was 5.0, etc.). The “0” behind the number of speakers was an indicator that the speaker count did not include any other supplemental speakers. The presence of a “1” in place of the “0” would indicate a subwoofer to handle low (bass and sub-bass) frequencies, while another “.2” or “.4” after the “1” or “0” would indicate the presence of two or four speakers, respectively, above the viewer. Thus, a more modern 7.1.4 setup would have included three speakers in front of the viewer (left, center, and

⁹⁷ Side 10 wasn't used, even though that could have allowed the finale of ROTJ to be in CAV if bonus features had been on side 10.

right), two “surround” speakers to the viewer’s direct left and right, a pair of “surround” speakers behind the viewer (also offset to left and right), a subwoofer, and four speakers above the rest (typically installed on the ceiling), which were set up as two toward the front (left and right) and the other two toward the back (left and right). Hence the speaker setup bearing the “7 (main and surround speakers) point 1 (subwoofer) point 4 (speakers above)” designation. In general, more channels of audio (and speakers available to actually use them) allowed for a more immersive listening experience. Whereas the *Definitive Collection* in 1993 and other, previous releases had provided Dolby Surround audio (a 4.0 setup for people who had a Dolby Pro Logic decoder that included channels for left, right, center, and rear surround), this 1997 *Special Edition* LaserDisc release marked the first to move into what would become a long-running standard (especially for the upcoming DVD format): 5.1 (front, center, left, two back surround speakers on left and right, and a subwoofer).

For LaserDisc, this was a solid release, even if its peak in saga releases had been in 1993. Unfortunately, there was a new format making waves in the late 1990s. VHS had won the Format War handily, and now DVD was poised to be the death knell of both surviving formats. The 1997 *Special Edition Trilogy* would be the last time a *Star Wars* film was released on LaserDisc in the United States.



The Special Edition Trilogy
(LaserDisc, 1997)



Disc jacket



Insert



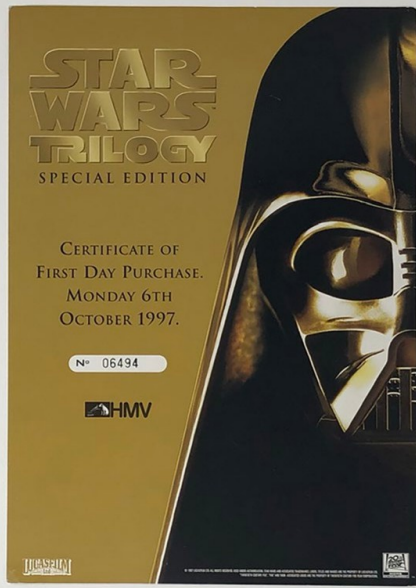
Disc label (ANH)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (1997)

In the UK, bonus items were available for those purchasing the *Special Edition Trilogy* on VHS. At HMV, purchasers on launch day received a special certificate and a poster. Meanwhile, Virgin Megastore and Virgin Group's Our Price stores offered a "The Ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi" action figure. The UK version of this figure came in a box with the figure's image and *Special Edition* branding, which distinguished it from its 1997 mail-away counterpart from the United States, which was acquired in simple white box through a Frito Lay promotion. Each UK figure was individually numbered on the box.



UK limited edition The Ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi action figure with purchase of the *Special Edition Trilogy* on VHS (1997) – Notice the individually numbered packaging that was designed around the figure, rather than just plain white.



HMV launch day certificate



HMV poster

100 Years, 100 Pounds (1998)

The original release of *A New Hope* in 1977 (as *Star Wars*, sans subtitle until 1981) was a landmark moment not just for the *Star Wars* saga but for the entire movie industry. As such, the film and its creators have been celebrated numerous times over the years. When the time comes to honor the great films of a particular era, if that time span includes 1977, we can expect ANH to be included among the honorees.

This was the case in 1998 when the American Film Institute (AFI) unveiled a list of 100 films selected to represent the best movies in 100 years of American filmmaking. ANH came in at number 15. This list of the top 100 American movies, chosen by over 1,500 leaders and artists in the film industry from among 400 nominated films, was unveiled during a special broadcast on CBS on June 16, 1998. Movies were required to meet seven criteria to be considered: be feature length (60+ minutes); receive critical recognition (in print); be a major award winner (in competitions within the film industry like the Academy Awards or at major film festivals); maintain popularity over time (as measured by box office receipts adjusted for inflation, home video sales, rentals, viewership when broadcast on television, etc.); have historical significance (within the development of the movie industry via storytelling, technology, etc.); have enduring cultural impact (on American society, not globally); and be “American.” The latter was defined not as necessarily having to be made in America (which would have knocked out ANH due to so much having been filmed elsewhere) but by having significant creative or financial aspects coming from the United States. ANH was “American” in both respects, while several other notable

inclusions (e.g. *Lawrence of Arabia*) were financed by American film companies but not actually made primarily by Americans.



AFI Century Collection: America's 100 Greatest Movies
(VHS, 1998) – Blockbuster exclusive

To commemorate this group of 100 outstanding movies (at least as far as the American Film Institute was concerned), a special, gigantic home video release was produced. This was the *AFI Century Collection: America's 100 Greatest Movies* VHS set, a full library of all 100 films from the list, contained in four enormous boxes, each weighing 25.4 pounds, making the entire *AFI Century Collection* 101.6 pounds.⁹⁸ The inclusion of ANH made this a part of the American *Star Wars* home video library (and the single heaviest item in that library by far at over 90 pounds heavier than either the U.S. *Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set or the *20th Century Fox 75th Anniversary Collection*).⁹⁹

A New Hope (listed only as *Star Wars*) could be found within the first of the four large gold/yellow boxes. Each giant box (approx. 20.4 in. x 20.1 in. x 6.2 in.) bore the *AFI Century Collection: America's 100 Greatest Movies* title on its front, along with the full “American Film Institute” name and a notation at the bottom that indicated that this “limited edition giftset” was exclusive to the Blockbuster video store chain. Stickers with matching limited edition numbers (out of only 2,500 sets produced) were located on the top of each box near its handle.¹⁰⁰ One side listed the 25 films in each box (by name and year of release) and included the *AFI Century Collection* logo, the

⁹⁸ Insert Marty McFly: “That’s heavy.”

⁹⁹ To be fair, though, this was not a “*Star Wars* release,” per se, nor was the *20th Century Fox 75th Anniversary Collection*, so the 1993 *Definitive Collection* is still the heaviest “*Star Wars* home video release.”

¹⁰⁰ The sheer weight caused those handles to easily break off.

America's 100 Greatest Movies subtitle separately, and the title of the list (and TV special) that gave birth to the set, *AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies*.



Example: box 1 of 4 (films 1 – 25)



Limited edition numbered sticker



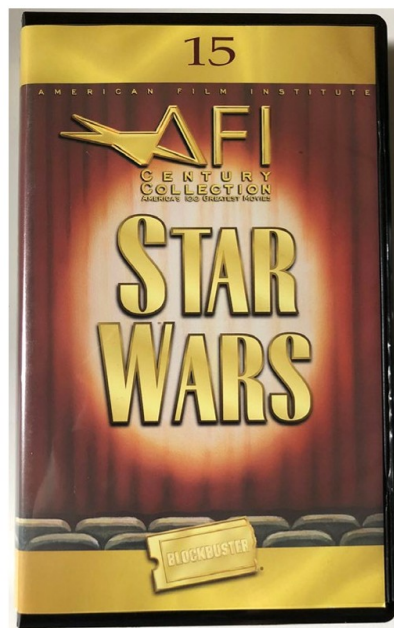
Blockbuster exclusivity note on bottom of front cover



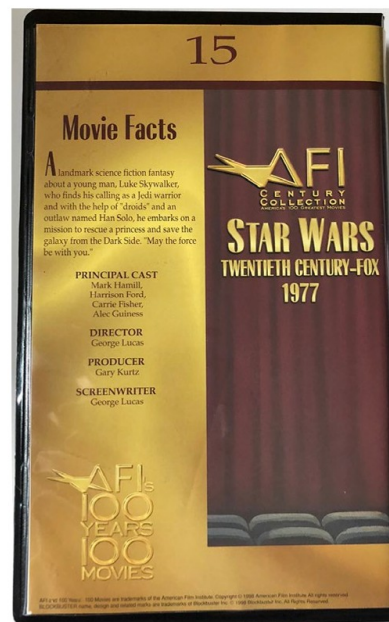
ANH ranking and date from side of box 1 (films 1 – 25, including ANH)

For each individual film, a retail copy of the movie was included that was no different by itself than any that one might have found in a typical video store. However, each retail copy was then placed within a special clamshell case to match all of the others in the set. The clamshells' spines, visible when one of the large boxes was opened, included (from top to bottom): the film's number out of the top 100; the AFI logo; the film's title; and the Blockbuster logo. A clamshell case's cover included (again, from top to bottom): the film's number out of the top 100; the American Film Institute name; the *AFI Century Collection: America's 100 Greatest Movies* logo; the film's title; and the Blockbuster logo. On both cover and spine, the Blockbuster logo and ranking number were found on gold bands, while the rest of the elements were placed over an image that resembled theater seats and a closed curtain with a spotlight shining behind the film's title on the cover (but merely the curtain without a spotlight behind the title on the spine).

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases

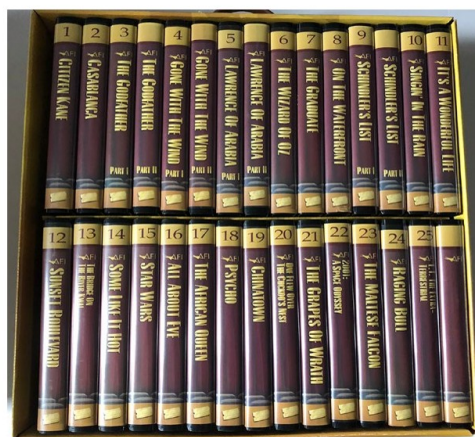


ANH AFI Century Collection
clamshell case (front)

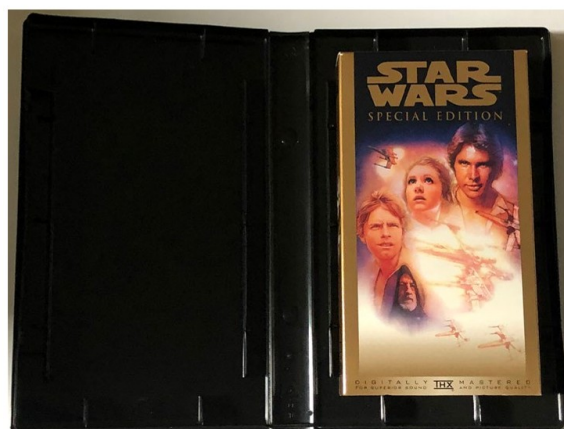


ANH AFI Century Collection
clamshell case (back)

The back of each clamshell case was a bit more interesting, since it provided more information on the film and why it was included among the 100 greatest American movies. The right side of the back cover provided the *Century Collection* logo again, the film's title, the relevant production company (in this case Twentieth Century-Fox, written out), and year of release (1977). The left side listed "Movie Facts," which included the names of the principal cast, director, producer, and screenwriter, alongside a description of the film.



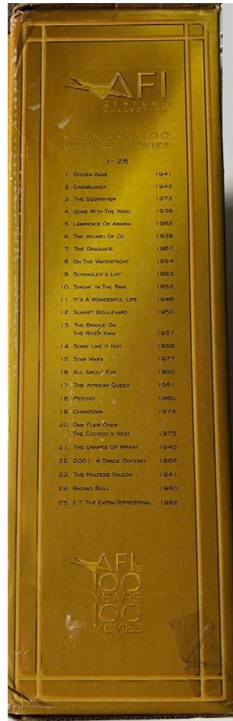
Interior of box 1
(with ANH in bottom row)



ANH full screen (VHS, 1995) within
AFI Century Collection clamshell case

In situations where a film was spread across two cassettes (e.g. *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Gone with the Wind*), each was given its own clamshell case (labeled

Part I and *Part II*), and the outer cardboard slipcover that would have held both retail cassettes was provided in a separate, smaller box. In cases where one of the four large boxes would have been left with extra space once all 25 films were inserted, empty “dummy” clamshell cases were inserted to fill the remaining space.



Box 1 side



AFI Century Collection logo on box side



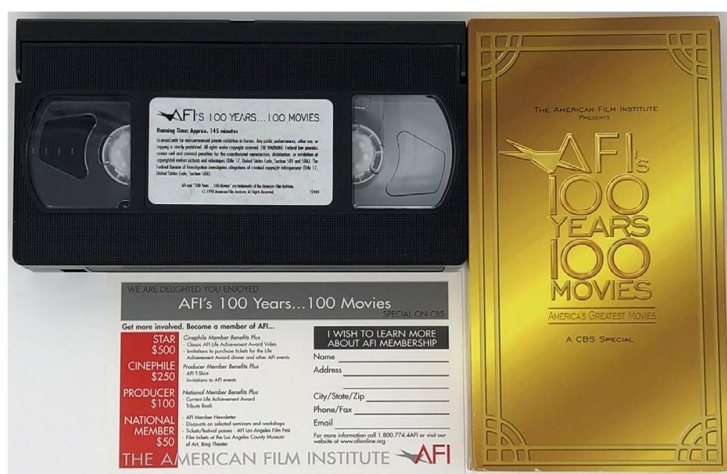
AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies logo on box side

Looking back on this set, it is unfortunate that it arrived in 1998 instead of 1996 or perhaps very early 1997. Its release the year after the *Special Editions* had arrived in theaters and on home video meant that the copy included would not be a pre-1997 version of ANH but instead its first major *Special Edition* revision from just the year before. Moreover, for some ungodly reason, the copy of ANH that was included was the full screen version, rather than a widescreen copy. Thus, ANH was being honored, in part, in relation to the year in which it had originally premiered, yet it was a later, different version of the film that marked its place in history in this set.¹⁰¹

Aside from this massive VHS set that weighed as much as a child in

¹⁰¹ We will see a similar situation with the 20th Century Fox 75th Anniversary Collection in the next chapter.

middle school, fans could also celebrate at home via home video releases of the CBS special. Of the full runtime, only a few minutes were devoted to ANH, of course, and that short segment featured comments by James Earl Jones, Samuel L. Jackson, and Ben Stiller. The special was released in a no-frills VHS version in 1998 through Columbia House in a gold-colored case dominated by the program's logo. A simple black and white label and an AFI membership application card finished out the package.



AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies (VHS, 1998)

One year later, 1999 saw two no-frills DVD releases of the special. One came in a standard DVD case, while the other came in what was known as a “snap case,” which was a case made primarily of cardboard (“paperboard”) with a plastic frame to hold the disc and snap it closed (hence the name). The snap case version (but not, as far as I can tell, the standard version) came with an insert that provided information on eight different audio formats (from Dolby Digital Mono to DTS). Both versions included similar case art to the VHS release (essentially just the VHS artwork with extra gold areas to either side). Disc labels were the same, regardless of packaging: a gradient gold with the expected title, logos, and text.



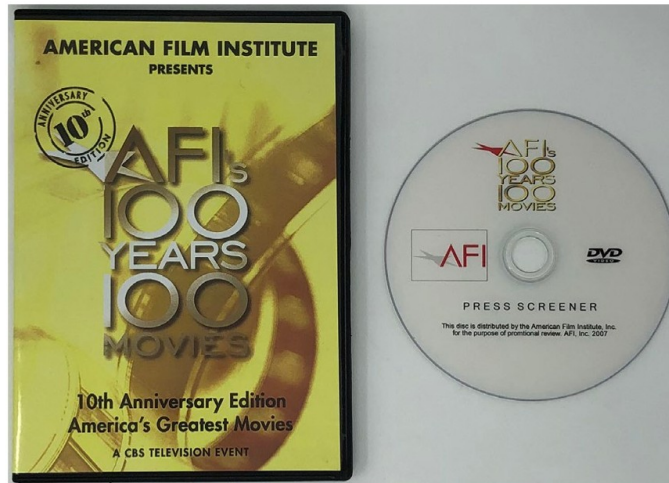
AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies
(DVD, 1999) – snap case



AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies
(DVD, 1999) – standard case

As the tenth anniversary of the creation of the original list (but only the ninth anniversary of the *Century Collection*, TV special, or unveiling of the list itself) neared, AFI revised the list to include films from the intervening decade. On this new list, ANH moved up two spots from 15 to 13. A special again aired on CBS to showcase this new list on June 20, 2007. The special and the list it featured were both known as the *AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies: 10th Anniversary Edition*. This new special included comments from Samuel L. Jackson, Harrison Ford, and (finally) George Lucas. While I have yet to confirm the existence of a retail home video release of this second special, it can be found from time to time on a limited number of screener DVDs (more specifically, DVD-R discs) that were produced in 2007 for promotional purposes.¹⁰² Cover art was yellow-themed and similar to the previous version in its logo but indicated that it was the *10th Anniversary Edition* multiple times. The disc's label was plain white with the logo for the special, AFI, the “DVD Video” logo, legalese, and a line denoting its status as a press screener.

¹⁰² See the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III* for more about screeners.



AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies: 10th Anniversary Edition press screener (DVD-R, 2007)

In the period between the original special and the revised version, American television network TNT and its UK counterpart (TNT UK) aired hour-long episodes of an *AFI 100 Years... 100 Movies* series. Each of the ten installments focused on a particular theme and used it to explore various films from the original list of 100. Strangely, the U.S. version of this series of mini-specials was narrated by James Woods with American actors Sally Field, Richard Gere, and Jodie Foster hosting. (For example, Jodie Foster hosted the episode “Fantastic Flights,” which included ANH.) The UK version, however, was produced by a different team, used at least some different interview clips, and were hosted by British actors instead, none of whom hosted multiple episodes. (For example, Helena Bonham Carter hosted the UK version of “Fantastic Flights.”)

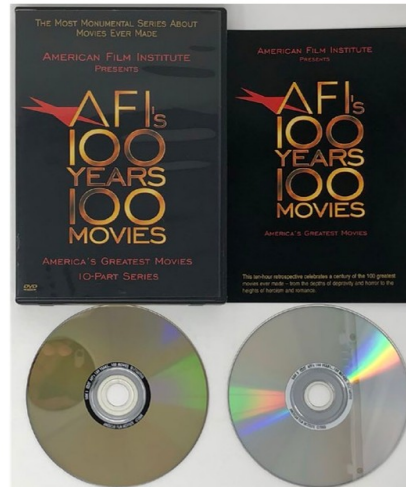
The American VHS releases, which each included a pair of episodes, came in individual cases with the series logo and the names of each included episode beneath. Labels were black and white with a similar layout. An American series set called (in some listings) the *Complete Edition* was available on VHS and DVD. Fortunately for those unwilling or unable to hunt down the full series, ANH was only featured in a single episode: “Fantastic Flights,” the series finale that focused on science fiction and fantasy concepts. Unfortunately, those seeking the complete series would have to deal with the fact that both of the two discs in the DVD set were double-sided (AKA “flipper”) discs with content on both sides and only a tiny label around their central holes. The first disc, which held three episodes per side, was dual-layered, while the second disc, which only held two episodes on each side, was single-layered. These were a loathed type of disc, though it likely kept production costs down for a set that was already

for a rather niche audience.¹⁰³

One could (and probably should) argue that these thematic episodes are even more tangential to *Star Wars* collecting than the *100 Years... 100 Movies* specials themselves, but discussing the entire event and its home video offshoots necessitates including at least a brief mention of those oddball, thematic specials.



AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies "Out of Control" and "Fantastic Flights"
(VHS, 2000)



AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies: Complete Edition (DVD, 2000)

Conclusion: A Dizzying Time

For better or worse, the *Special Editions* marked changes in the films and how we watched them. We had entered an age when tinkering with the films did not just mean a layer of spit and polish to provide a better viewing experience for the same film as before. Instead, we were seeing changes, additions, and controversies as the order of the day. The demise of LaserDisc as a viable format for *Star Wars* home video releases was simply another spin to an already dizzying time for *Star Wars* fans.

The home video market was changing, and the *Star Wars* saga had changed, but more profound changes were yet to come as George Lucas had entered production on the *Prequel Trilogy*.

¹⁰³ We will look at the issue of "flipper" DVDs when they impact *Star Wars* releases in the chapter *Teddy Bears, Towanis, and Trouble Again* in *Volume III*.

5 RISE OF DVD, DEMISE OF VHS (2000 – 2010)

1999 marked momentous changes in *Star Wars* storytelling. The *Prequel Trilogy* began in theaters with *The Phantom Menace* on May 19, opening up a new era of exploration of *Original Trilogy* characters' origins on the big screen. Accompanying this, the Prequel Era became the playground of licensees like Dark Horse Comics.¹⁰⁴ In *Star Wars* novels, the saga “came home” by returning to Del Rey (publisher of *Star Wars* novels from 1976 until 1983), first with the novelization of TPM in Apr. 1999 and then with the launch of the first massive *Star Wars* novel arc, *The New Jedi Order*, with *Vector Prime* in Oct. 1999. For *Star Wars* on home video, though, the question of how the saga would be handled in a marketplace beginning the slow but inexorable shift from VHS to DVD would be answered not in 1999 but in the years that followed.

Narrowing the Gap (2000)

For those keeping score, a pattern emerged in the 1980s that showed a narrowing of the gap between theatrical and home video releases for *Star Wars* films with each subsequent episode. For *A New Hope*, it was a gap of five years between 1977 and 1982. For *The Empire Strikes Back*, the gap was one year less (four years: 1980 – 1984). *Return of the Jedi* then narrowed the gap by one year again (three years: 1983 – 1986). The *Special Editions* were

¹⁰⁴ Okay, to be fair, Dark Horse actually released the first issue of its first *Prequel Trilogy* tie-in with “Prelude to Rebellion, Part I” in *Star Wars* #1 in late Dec. 1998.

somewhat of an aberration, seeing theatrical release in the first quarter of the year, rather than in May, and being films that were revised and re-released, rather than brand new in their entirety. As an apparent result, they had seen VHS and LaserDisc release in the same year they were in theaters (1997).

One would have hoped that by the end of the 1990s, a new *Star Wars* film could be released in theaters in May and arrive on home video the same calendar year. Alas, that was not to be, and *The Phantom Menace* arrived on VHS Apr. 3, 2000, just 46 days shy of a full year after its theatrical release. One should note here that while that was certainly disappointing, another aspect of this release was perhaps even more disappointing to American home video collectors of the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike *Episodes IV – VI*, *Episode I* did not get an American LaserDisc release, marking the moment fans realized that the 1997 *Special Edition Trilogy* LaserDisc set was truly the format's last hurrah for the saga in the U.S.

Meanwhile in Japan (2000)

While LaserDisc releases for *Star Wars* ended in the U.S. with the 1997 *Special Edition Trilogy* boxed set, Japan held onto the format for a tiny bit longer. Thus, in 2000, the Japanese market saw the release of *The Phantom Menace* on a two-disc, CLV extended play LaserDisc set in letterboxed widescreen format with Dolby Digital Surround EX (Dolby Digital 5.1 EX) audio. The disc jacket used the same standardized artwork of the characters seen on American VHS releases and many others worldwide. The jacket opened to reveal a shot of Theed Palace on Naboo and a chapter listing. The disc label included the film's logo (with the episode's name in Japanese) above gold text and icons against a black background.



TPM (Japanese LaserDisc, 2000) –
with obi



TPM (Japanese LaserDisc, 2000) –
without obi



Jacket (open)



Disc label

This product lacked any bonus features, but with a DVD of TPM still a year away, many American fans stuck with LaserDisc and imported copies of this release.

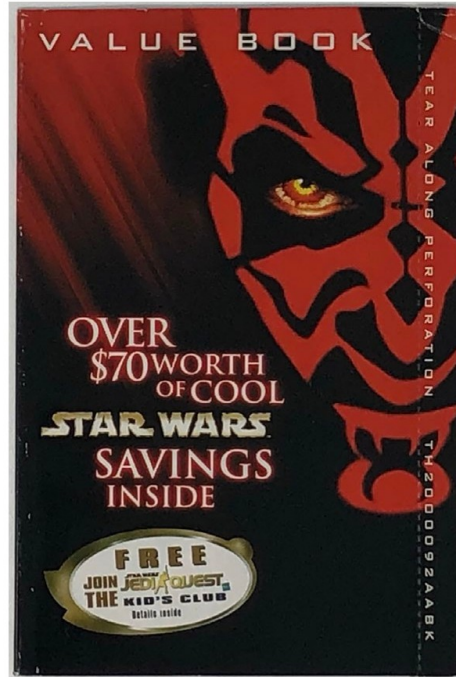
On VHS, *The Phantom Menace* came in the usual two flavors: full screen (pan and scan) and widescreen (letterboxed). Similar to 1992, the movie's widescreen release was treated as something special for more discerning viewers, rather than being presented in a fashion more in line with its full screen equivalent (as in 1997 and, to a degree, 1995). The full screen release (with no indicator noting it as such, just a regular bottom-loading cardboard case) featured no extras to accompany the film.

Cover art for the full screen release featured the film's logo (*Star Wars* in gradient gold with the film's title in white text, both in front of the episode number as a gold Roman numeral) at the top, THX information at the

bottom, and a gold-bordered box with rectangular (taller than wide) artwork that showcased the film’s characters (Qui-Gon Jinn, Padmé Amidala, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Anakin Skywalker) and the podracers driven by Anakin and Sebulba (which slightly emerged from the box). The cassette label was printed directly onto the cassette (as we will see in comparison photos with the widescreen version and some variants shortly).



TPM full screen (VHS, 2000)



TPM VHS “value book” (coupon book)

Those seeking to squeeze a bit of extra value out of their purchase could use various offers from a small “value book” (i.e. a collection of offers, coupons, etc.) that was included inside the slipcase.

The widescreen version of the film was made available to the U.S. market only in the *Widescreen Video Collector's Edition*.¹⁰⁵ The widescreen cassette was marked as such on a “label” printed onto the cassette itself and in a subtly altered case that bore a “widescreen” notation at the top similar to 1992’s *Special Letterbox Collector's Edition* and a label near the bottom proclaiming it a “Special Collector’s Edition.” It also bore a wider, slightly altered version of the artwork found on the full screen version (with Qui-gon joining the podracers in breaking out of the box). That cassette (in its

¹⁰⁵ That’s either a “Collector’s Edition” that included a “Widescreen Video” or perhaps a “Widescreen... Edition” for the “Video Collector.”

case) was then placed inside a flat box that denoted it as the *Widescreen Video Collector's Edition*. Also in the box was a snippet of film cells from the movie (on a card with the Maul, Obi-Wan, and Qui-Gon art seen on either side of the cassette cases), along with an abridged version of the book *Art of Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (with N-1 starfighters on the cover). The cassette's contents included a trailer for the official *Star Wars* website (launched in 1996) and an exclusive featurette entitled *Filmmaking Has Turned a Corner*. The cassette itself had its label printed onto the cassette, rather than as a typical sticker, just like the full screen version.

This was a very nice way of owning the widescreen version of TPM on VHS, but with DVD growing as a medium, it was still a bit of a letdown that the film did not see a simultaneous release on DVD.

For collectors, a few other items are of note regarding the TPM VHS launch before we move on. First, widescreen copies were *not* released in the U.S. outside of the *Widescreen Video Collector's Edition*. Yes, they show up on places like eBay constantly, but these are either from another region or the cassette from inside a *Widescreen Video Collector's Edition* without any of the other goodies or outer packaging.



TPM *Widescreen Video Collector's Edition* (VHS, 2000)

Top: packaging and abridged *The Art of Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace*

Bottom: VHS cassette, VHS case, and film snippet



Case comparison – full screen (left) vs. widescreen (right)

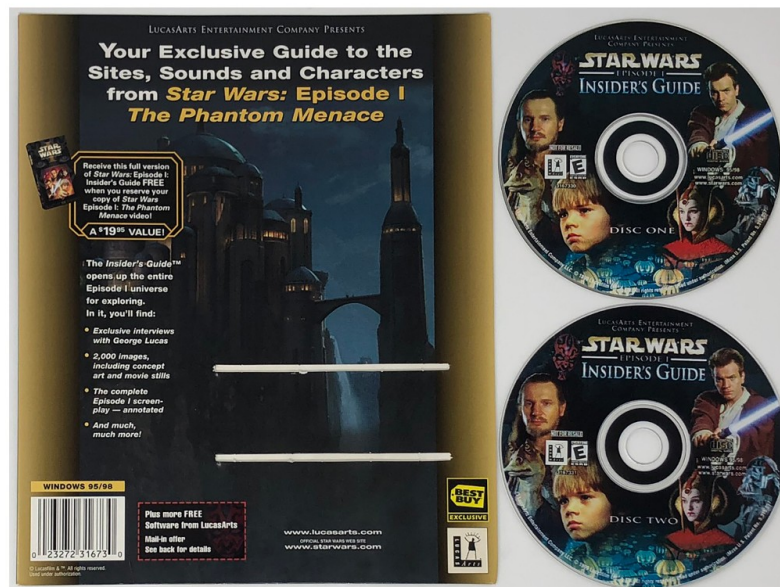
Second, for those seeking variants, toy retailer Toys “R” Us allowed those who ordered TPM to pick up a special, alternate case. This was a gold clamshell case (similar in size to the 1997 *Animated Classics* releases for *Droids* and *Ewoks*¹⁰⁶) with an insert that resembled the regular full screen case. The front and back were identical to the full screen case, though the right side (spine) panel was flip-flopped to the other side so that Maul could be on the clamshell case’s only side. Of more interest was a lenticular version of the front cover, which was slipped into the case on top of the regular front flap of the paper insert. Buyers would receive this clamshell case in separate shrink wrap, then get their copy of the film, which they could put inside the clamshell while still in its own case. Only full screen copies were sold this way, and the clamshell case, like the regular full screen case, stated, “This film has been modified from its original version. It has been formatted to fit your [4:3] screen.”

¹⁰⁶ See the chapter *Teddy Bears, Towanis, and Trouble Again* in *Volume III*.



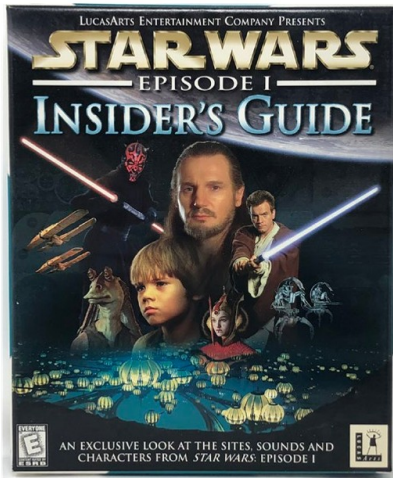
TPM Toys “R” Us VHS clamshell case (right) with lenticular insert (left)

Meanwhile, while not offering a variant of the actual TPM VHS release, Best Buy offered its own exclusive bonus for fans who preordered the film through one of their stores. The retailer provided a full, two-disc copy (marked as “not for resale”) of the *Star Wars: Episode I Insider's Guide* CD-ROM, an excellent Windows 95/98 program that provided a great deal of TPM information, including 2,000 images, interviews, a full annotated screenplay, and more. The discs came packaged in shrink wrap against a double-layered cardboard “sheet” with slots to hold the discs once opened.



Best Buy *Episode I: Insider's Guide* bonus item (CD-ROM, 2000)

The back of that cardboard holder also provided a special mail-in offer, through which fans could purchase a *Star Wars* PC video game (*Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*, *X-wing Collector Series*, *Rogue Squadron*, *X-wing Alliance*, *Episode I: Racer*, or the TPM game) at Best Buy and then mail in a copy of their receipt, the game's proof-of-purchase seal, and a completed form found on the cardboard holder itself (which had to be cut out) to receive a free copy of the (also excellent) *Behind the Magic* CD-ROM.¹⁰⁷ A buyer taking full advantage of this preorder promotion would have saved approximately \$39.90.¹⁰⁸



Original *Episode I: Insider's Guide* retail packaging (CD-ROM, 1999)



Behind the Magic retail item available via Best Buy offer (CD-ROM, 1998)

If you *really* want to get into the weeds on variants, both the full screen and widescreen TPM VHS cassettes actually had two different label variants. During some print runs of the cassettes, labels (which were actually printed onto the cassettes, rather than stickers) were printed with the text beneath the FBI warning indented. This left a big empty block of space beneath the FBI symbol and caused the text on the far right of that section to run into a tiny circular indentation (found on many VHS cassettes), which disrupted the text. It seems that this was spotted early, so other print runs have the text aligned with the left margin with the rest of

¹⁰⁷ This CD-ROM was perhaps best known for being the first official place that fans could view deleted scenes from ANH that had long been rumored to exist, such as the conversation between Luke and Biggs at Tosche Station.

¹⁰⁸ That would have been about \$60 in 2020 dollars. Not too shabby!

the text and the FBI symbol, so that text was no longer interrupted.¹⁰⁹



TPM VHS label comparison (left to right): full screen (indented); full screen (left-aligned); widescreen (indented); widescreen (left-aligned)

Finally, while the earliest full screen VHS copies produced did not include a trailer for the official *Star Wars* website before the film, copies produced later (yet still before release) did.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2000)

TPM offers us a chance to take a quick detour to the United Kingdom for a phenomenon not usually seen in America. In the UK, one could often find copies of recent films on VHS for rental, just as in the U.S., but in order to distinguish between rental and retail copies in the UK, rental clamshell cases were significantly larger than those of their retail counterparts, as seen in this example of the full screen TPM retail and rental versions from 2000. The retail version's clamshell case measured only 4.88 in. x 7.63 in., whereas the rental version's clamshell case was a comparatively massive 5.5 in. x 8.69 in.

¹⁰⁹ It is partially speculation on my part that the indented version that disrupted text came before the “fixed” version that did not interrupt the text. It makes logical sense that it would’ve happened in that order, and the printing/production dates on my personal copies seem to bear that out.

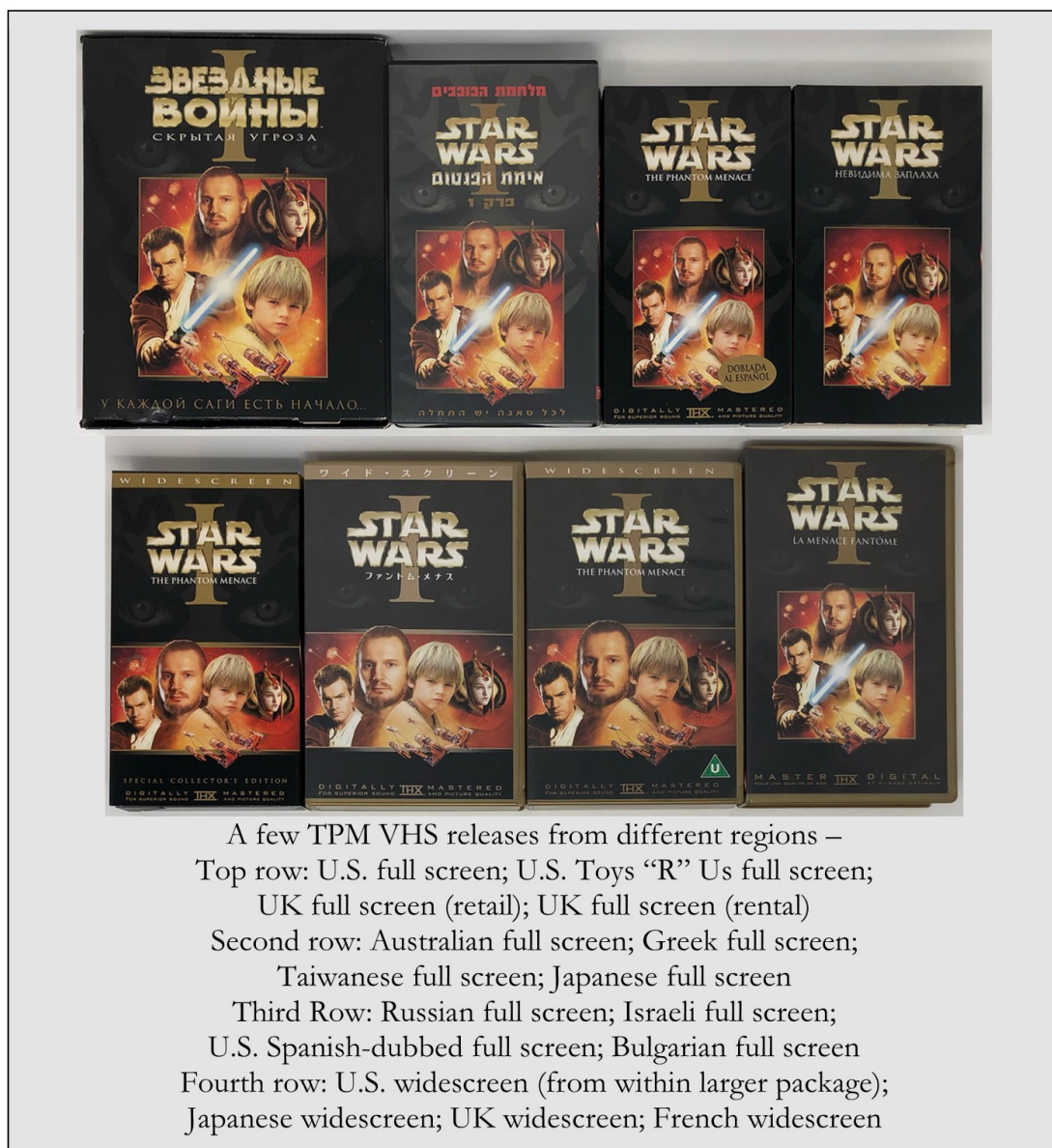
¹¹⁰ I personally own a copy printed in Oct. 1999 that lacks the trailer and one from Jan. 2000 that has the trailer. This can’t have been a post-launch change because, of course, the home video launch was not until Apr. 2000.



TPM (UK VHS, 2000) – full screen retail (left) vs. rental (right)

Across the Galaxy
The Phantom Menace on VHS (2000)





See It Again... For the First Time, for the Last Time (2000)

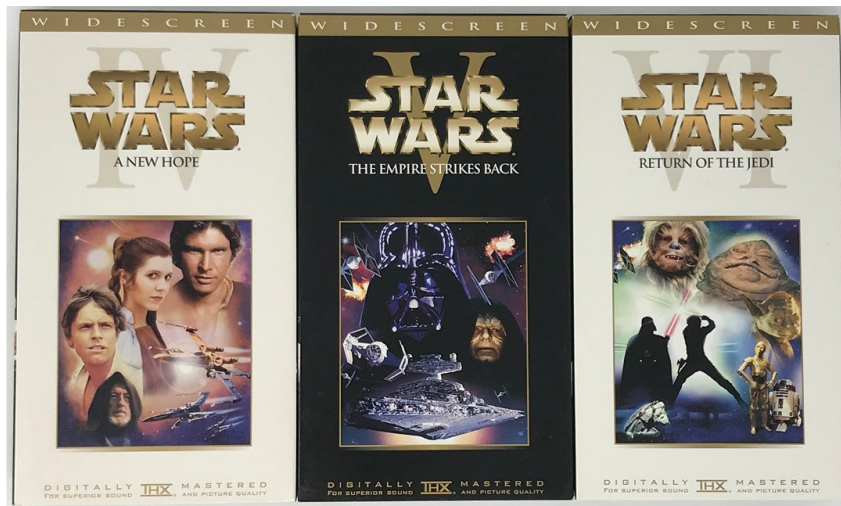
While the initial home video release of *The Phantom Menace* made the most waves in 2000, one should not forget that while the era of the *Prequel Trilogy* on home video was beginning, the era of the *Original Trilogy* on VHS was coming to an end.

On Nov. 21, 2000, the *Original Trilogy* (in its 1997 *Special Edition* incarnation) arrived on VHS for the last time. Each episode could be purchased separately or as the last pair (full screen and widescreen) of VHS boxed set “bricks” to be released in the U.S. As in previous releases, the idea that the “normal” release would be full screen and the widescreen version would need to be marked as such continued. Each set fit the three films into an identical “brick” front-to-back and loaded from one side, similar to the 1995 full screen package and 1997 regular VHS sets. A plastic

slipcover slid on from the top (or bottom if you felt like it), and each slipcover had clear sections on three sides to show the box beneath. The placement of the clear sections was different on each, so that the full screen version's clear sections ran vertically down its faces, while the widescreen version's clear sections allowed wide action scenes to show through the bottom third of a side and entirely blocked out the rest.



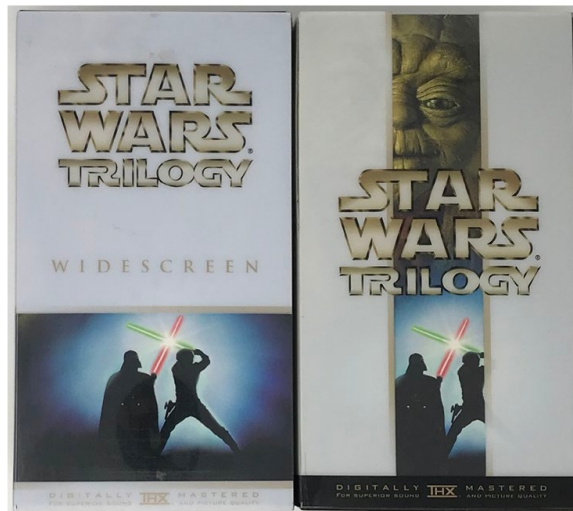
ANH, TESB, and ROTJ full screen (VHS, 2000)



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ widescreen (VHS, 2000)

In terms of content, TESB and ROTJ were simply the films with official *Star Wars* website trailers running before them. (Gone were the *Special Edition* featurettes from 1997.) ANH also included the website trailer but then played a special featurette called *Episode II: The Saga Continues*, which

provided a bit of insight into the return of the Lars moisture farm and the characters of Owen Lars and Beru Whitesun (not yet a Lars) in *Attack of the Clones*, which was still two years away and untitled.¹¹¹



The Original Trilogy (VHS, 2000) – “Duel” side comparison:
widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)



“X-wings” side comparison: widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)

¹¹¹ The title would not be announced until Aug. 6, 2001.



“Droids” side (spine) comparison: widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)



2000 VHS interior packaging art (without slipcover) –
The side not shown was simply the open end to insert all three cassettes into.



Slipcover spine comparison:
widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)



2000 VHS “value booklet” (coupon book) and *Jedi Knights* promo card

With this set and the TPM release, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment seemed poised to set a stylistic pattern for the saga's newest VHS installments. Each featured an image of the characters in a rectangle. Above was a film logo composed of a large *Star Wars* logo, the film's individual title beneath, and a large Roman numeral of its episode number behind both. TPM featured a black background with a shadowy Maul face, similar to a black cover (sans Maul) for TESB, while ANH and ROTJ cases had white backgrounds. In other words, odd numbered episodes were in black, while even numbered episodes were in white. This presented an interesting new pattern for *Star Wars* VHS packaging... which would completely fall apart two years later when *Attack of the Clones* (an even-numbered episode) was released with black packaging instead of white.¹¹²

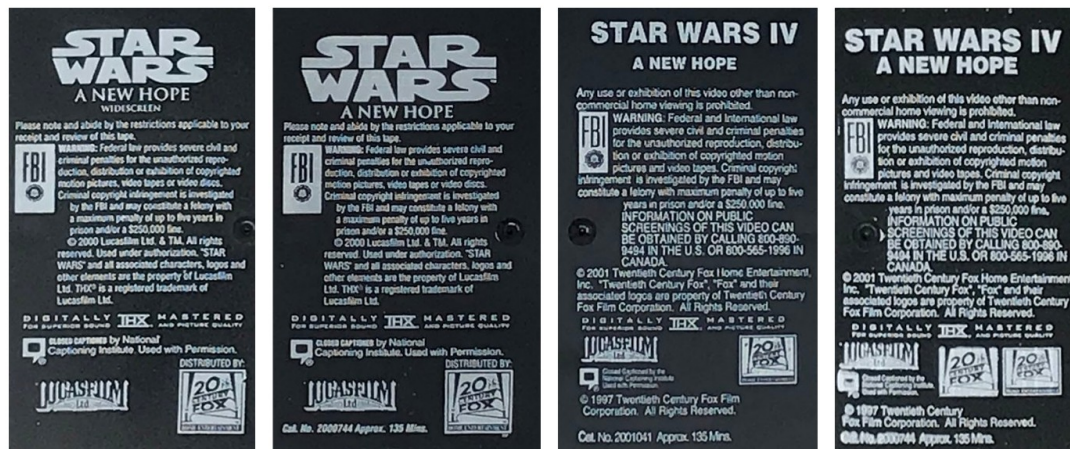
The artwork, at least, remained consistent in style. ANH artwork featured Han Solo, Leia Organa, Luke Skywalker, and Obi-Wan Kenobi near a pair of X-wings. TESB artwork was a bit odd in that it featured Darth Vader, an Imperial Star Destroyer, and a pair of TIE fighters, which made sense for the film, but then also Ian McDiarmid's version of Emperor Sheev Palpatine (who was still played by Clive Revill in this cut of TESB)

¹¹² I should also note that while the full screen copies of all four films had similar “picture in a box” cover images, the widescreen *Original Trilogy* films did *not* match the TPM widescreen VHS by expanding the width of their cover images. Instead, they matched the full screen versions.

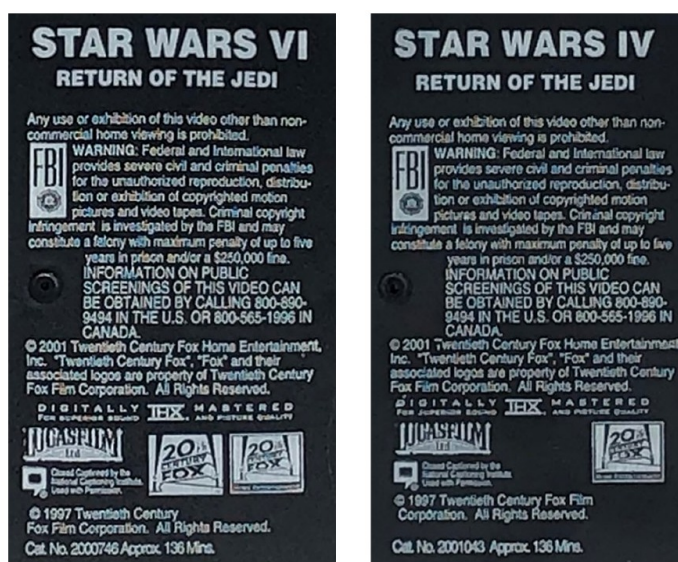
and Vader's TIE Advanced x1 (which appeared in ANH, not TESB). ROTJ artwork featured Chewbacca, Jabba the Hutt, Yoda, C-3PO, R2-D2, and the *Millennium Falcon* next to a silhouette of Luke Skywalker dueling Darth Vader. Unlike the VHS releases of TPM (and, as we will soon see, AOTC), none of the elements of the artwork in the boxes for these releases broke the boundaries of their frames.

This release also included a "value booklet" of *Star Wars* offers and coupons with C-3PO and R2-D2 on the cover, plus an informational slip and Darth Vader's Lightsaber game card to promote the *Jedi Knights* trading card game (TCG) from Decipher.

Variant hunters should note that both releases (which each have a 2000 copyright date on the packaging) could be found with two different label styles. Cassettes that were produced in 2000 (with that date on their labels) for the first print runs bore labels with a typical *Star Wars* logo, the film title, and widescreen indicator (when applicable) below it. However, later printings of the sets had updated labels with altered text and a 2001 copyright date. For both widescreen and full screen, titles that had been true logos in 2000 became plain text for these 2001 printings, presented as *Star Wars* and the film's episode number as a Roman numeral with the film's subtitle below. Widescreen copies from 2001 were not labeled as such, but there was an easy way to distinguish between formats. Whereas both formats included a 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment logo (as had the 2000 printings), full screen copies from 2001 also included a 20th Century Fox (sans "Home Entertainment") logo directly to the left of the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment logo. Also of note was a misprint in 2001 for the widescreen release of ROTJ, at least some copies of which included the wrong Roman numeral for the film's episode number, listing it as *Star Wars IV* instead of *VI*.



Label comparison (left to right): 2000 widescreen; 2000 full screen; 2001 widescreen; 2001 full screen



2001 ROTJ label comparison: full screen with correct Roman numeral (left) vs. widescreen with incorrect Roman numeral (right)

This release marked the end of the *Original Trilogy* on VHS, though not of *Star Wars* as a whole on the format. That was still two years away. It would not be until 2004 that the *Original Trilogy* would see another home video release (and another round of tinkering by George Lucas on the road to that release).

Meanwhile in Malaysia (2000)

With no word yet on DVD releases of the *Original Trilogy* and a DVD of *The Phantom Menace* not yet released, 2000 saw an unusually high rate of imports of *Star Wars* VCDs from Malaysia. VCD stands for Video Compact Disc, a standard definition, digital home video medium that was popular in Asia during the 1990s. (This is not to be confused with CD Video, also known as CDV, CD-V, or CD+V, which was a similar but analog, or “non-digital,” medium.) It was developed in 1993 by Sony, Philips, JVC, and Matsushita, using the same compact disc medium that was already being used for music, data, etc. Unfortunately, this meant that storage space was limited, as the most common discs could only carry around 650 MB or 700 MB.

The two-disc VCD release of TPM and a boxed set of the *Original Trilogy* were released in 2000 through VideoVan. Both were widely imported into the U.S., despite warnings on the discs themselves that they should not be made available outside of Malaysia (probably due to licensing rights), thanks in large part to the growth of internet commerce. Fans seeking these out and excited about the idea of each being two discs should not have gotten their hopes up for extra bonus features. Due to a VCD's

limited storage space, each film had to be split across two VCDs, similar to how LaserDisc and CED releases were often split across multiple sides of a disc (or even multiple discs). The set did still include the same *Episode II: The Saga Continues* featurette found on the American VHS set, located on the first disc of ANH before the film.



TPM (Malaysian VCD, 2000) – outer cover (left) and contents (right)

TPM's two discs featured the same art as used for the American VHS releases. Discs were housed in two separate, single-disc jewel cases, one of which featured cover art of Obi-Wan (taken from the same art as the disc labels) with a shot of the Naboo duel behind him, while the other featured Maul. The jewel cases were placed in a vertical row and covered by an outer piece of cardstock that could only be called a "case" in the loosest possible sense. It was simply a piece of tall cardstock, the front of which included the film's logo, cover art (similar to the American VHS artwork but with Qui-Gon, Padmé, and Obi-Wan now partially emerging from the box), a pair of icons (the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment and VCD logos), and the film's tagline. The left side acted as a spine with relevant information, while the back resembled the back of the film's VHS packaging. The interior, when unfolded, revealed a shot of Theed Palace on Naboo. There was no top, bottom, or right side to the "package." Instead, this cardstock "cover" just wrapped around the discs to cover them from the front, left, and back, but left the other sides entire open. Despite being designed to look like a package in which to keep this release, it seems to have been primarily designed to simply make the film recognizable on store shelves when in shrink wrap, then discarded. It was, to put it mildly, disappointing "packaging."



TPM discs in jewel cases with outer packaging folded fully open

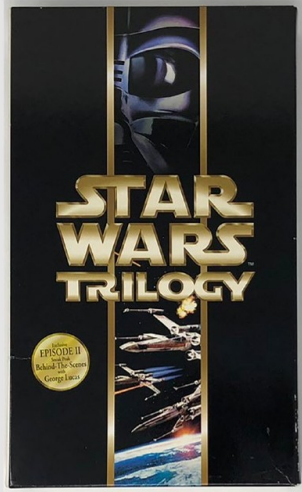


TPM packaging from bottom – Notice that it was just a flimsy piece of cardstock that wrapped around the cases to cover the left spine, front, and back of the jewel cases, leaving the right spine, top, and bottom entirely open.

The *Original Trilogy* set fared far better. Each film came on a pair of VCDs with labels that featured a single character (C-3PO for ANH, Vader for TESB, or Yoda for ROTJ) on the left half and a solid color (white for ANH and ROTJ, black for TESB) on the right with the film's logo. Both discs for a film were contained in a single, two-disc jewel case, which again used the same artwork as their American VHS cases. The left area of the cover (the portion that was part of the bottom of the case, running next to the lid) was clear instead of the usual black, which allowed a section to promote this as the “original, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment premiere” release. All three jewel cases were then held securely in separate slots within a cardboard box with a folding lid. The box design resembled the American, full screen VHS set, using the black “Vader” side for its front and the white “droids” side as its back. Interior art featured the TIE fighters chasing Luke during the Battle of Yavin. As one would expect, this set is far more easily found intact today than its pathetically-packaged TPM counterpart of the same year.

One should also note that, unlike some VCDs in other regions of the world (some of which we will see in related sidebars as we continue forward), these discs did not include subtitles and were not dubbed into

another language, making them perfect for English speaking audiences. Even the packaging for the trilogy and TPM (such as it was) included only English.



The Original Trilogy
(Malaysian VCD, 2000)



ANH jewel case and disc labels



TESB jewel case and disc labels



ROTJ jewel case and disc labels

Meanwhile in Hong Kong (2000)

As a means of comparison, let's take a moment to also look at another major source location for VCDs that were often imported into the United States: Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong market received two different versions of the TPM VCD, which exemplified how some markets with a dominant language other than English addressed *Star Wars* releases. The first Hong Kong

version included the standard English audio of the film with built-in subtitles, while the second lacked subtitles but was dubbed entirely in Cantonese. (The subtitled version included subtitles when running the original English opening crawl, while the dubbed version actually switched the written language of the crawl itself.)

Both were distributed by Deltamac of Hong Kong and came in a pair of jewel cases (like their Malaysian counterpart) that were held in a sturdy outer package (quite *unlike* their Malaysian counterpart). The outer cases were nearly identical, except for different product numbers (11164 for subtitled, 11165 for dubbed) and a small sticker on the dubbed version to denote that fact.



TPM (Hong Kong VCD, 2000) – English language (i.e. subtitled) version (left) and Cantonese dubbed version (right)

Jewel case inserts were identical between the two releases, but the discs themselves were not. Both products' discs were much shinier (almost to the point of ridiculousness) than their Malaysian counterparts with similar artwork (i.e. art from what we think of as the full screen VHS case in the U.S.). The discs could be distinguished between Hong Kong versions by the position and/or existence of various icons on their discs. For example, the translated title (also found on the jewel case covers/inserts below the English logo) was not found on the subtitled version's discs at all but was included on the lower left of the disc label for the Cantonese dubbed version. Each disc included three other icons: the Video CD logo; the symbol of the Sony Digital Authoring Studio; and the local "I" rating (meaning "suitable for all ages"). On the subtitled version, these were found to the lower left of the label, where the dubbed version's translated title was

located. The dubbed version shifted the icons to the right side of the label.

The outer packaging and jewel case cover art looked very much like the Malaysian version, albeit with the translated title beneath the film's logo on the jewel case covers and below the picture on the outer package (instead of the "Every saga has a beginning" tagline). Generally speaking, though, the outer box was simply much nicer for this release than the one from Malaysia that was more frequently imported. On the other hand, the Hong Kong releases did alter the presentation from a "pristine" original English presentation of the film to add either subtitles or dubbing, making these less sought after by American importers, despite the Malaysian release's awful outer packaging. In the end, I suppose which version was superior between the two regions was a matter of personal taste more than anything else.



Jewel cases (identical for both Hong Kong versions)



Label comparison: English language (i.e. subtitled) version (left) vs. Cantonese dubbed version (right) – Notice the (admittedly tough to see in print) icon differences to left and right of the center hole, plus the (easier to see) translated film logo to the left of the center hole for the dubbed version.

The DVD Menace (2001)

By 2001, videophiles were clamoring for *Star Wars* films on DVD. Demand was high to see the pop cultural phenomenon with the kind of clarity the new format could provide, along with the wealth of bonus features the format could bring to the table.

DVDs (Digital Versatile Discs) were a new format developed by Sony, Panasonic, Philips, and Toshiba that first reached the Japanese market in 1996 and later emerged on the U.S. market in 1997. A standard, single-layer DVD (known as a DVD-5) could hold 4.7 GB of data, while the dual-layer DVD (known as a DVD-9) that became the norm for movie releases could hold 8.5 GB of content.

As with any of the standard definition (SD) formats we have seen so far, DVDs were produced in either NTSC or PAL (with regions that used SECAM now using PAL). Moreover, to protect distribution rights, discs were authored with built-in region codes that determined which countries' equipment could play the discs, regardless of whether that region's standard was NTSC or PAL. There were six geographically-defined regions. The U.S. was part of Region 1, alongside Canada and Bermuda. Most of Europe, Turkey, the Middle East, South Africa, and Japan were Region 2. Southeast Asia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau made up Region 3. Most of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania (including Australia) were Region 4. Most of Africa, some former Eastern Bloc countries (Russia, Ukraine, et al), Central and South Asia, and North Korea were Region 5. Mainland China had Region 6 to itself. Two non-geographical, yet still restricted, regions were Region 7 for pre-release "media copies" of films in Asia, along with Region 8 for airlines, cruise ships, and (no kidding) spacecraft. Those looking for a disc that could be played in multiple regions could hunt down a Region 0 disc that was entirely region-free or a disc encoded as "ALL" that had all eight region markers active. Whether a disc used NTSC or PAL standards depended on country, not region coding. For example, both the UK (PAL) and Japan (NTSC) used discs encoded for Region 2.

Oct. 15, 2001, finally brought the first *Star Wars* film to DVD. Retailing for about \$30¹¹³, *The Phantom Menace* arrived in a two-disc DVD set. The film was presented in widescreen on disc 1 with a full-length audio commentary (something not seen, even in smaller, chunked commentary bits, since 1993's *The Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set).

¹¹³ That would be about \$46 in 2020 dollars.

It is important to note here, as we move from the VHS and LaserDisc era to the DVD era, that widescreen presentations *usually* ceased to be letterboxed on the newer format and were instead anamorphic widescreen. Anamorphic widescreen stored an image in a “squished” format, which was then restored to its original aspect ratio by external means (e.g. a special lens, a player, etc.). On a 4:3 television, an anamorphic widescreen picture displayed exactly like a letterboxed widescreen source, but when played on a widescreen TV, an anamorphic widescreen presentation stretched all the way across the width of the screen and filled in any dead space above or below the picture (usually with black bars). This eliminated the issue of letterboxed 4:3 sources being played on widescreen televisions that created a small central image with large black spaces to left and right (along with the 4:3 letterboxed image’s built-in black spaces above and below). It was the standard for widescreen DVD releases, and this was the first *Star Wars* release to be presented in anamorphic widescreen since a special Super 8 reel used the format with an anamorphic projector lens in 1977. Hereafter, when I refer to a *Star Wars* DVD as “widescreen,” it was anamorphic widescreen unless specifically noted as letterboxed.

We should also note that, starting with this release, *Star Wars* films on DVD would typically include Dolby Digital Surround EX (or Dolby Digital 5.1 EX) audio when produced by 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, or eventually Dolby Digital 5.1 in the Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment era. The key difference between the “EX” and “standard” Dolby Digital 5.1 audio setups was that the “EX” version actually carried an extra channel that would work with home theaters that were set up with a sixth main speaker, making this an early 6.1 home video audio option.¹¹⁴ (It was distributed to the other speakers when not used on a 6.1 setup, and some DVDs, such as several *Star Wars* releases, would have the “EX” aspect turned off by default so that one would have to manually enable it on their home theater.)

Disc 2 housed a treasure trove of bonus features, including a full-length documentary entitled *The Beginning*, featurettes (5), animatics (2), web documentaries from the official *Star Wars* website (12), deleted scenes (7), still galleries (production photos, print campaign, and posters), trailers (teaser trailer, theatrical trailer, and “Duel of the Fates” music video), TV advertisements (2 regular, 5 “tone poems”), and *Starfighter: The Making of a Game*.

¹¹⁴ We will see the first *Star Wars* product to actually carry a 6.1 audio notation on its packaging in the next chapter, when Blu-rays arrive with 6.1 DTS-HD audio.



TPM (DVD, 2001)

This release was also notable for its inclusion of something found periodically on DVDs but less so in the era of Blu-ray: “Easter eggs.” The term refers to hidden bonus features, usually minor items, that can be accessed on a DVD (or Blu-ray) if the user knows a certain “secret” way to find them. For this inaugural *Star Wars* DVD release, each disc had an Easter egg. On disc 1, entering the code “1138” (usually entered as “10+, 1, 3, 8,”) would provide a gag reel, mixed in with the DVD’s production credits. (This could also be accessed directly by going to title 3 in the disc’s organizational structure.) On disc 2, two extra 2 – 3 minute documentary bits relating to the deleted parts of the podrace could be found by going to the “Deleted Scenes and Documentaries” section, then “Deleted Scenes Only.” While on that menu screen, the viewer would cycle to either of the first two deleted scenes (“Complete Podrace Grid Sequence” or “Extended Podrace Lap Two”) and highlight the “Doc Menu” option on the left. While that option was highlighted, clicking to the right highlighted a small rectangular part of the energy gate emitter between the “Doc Menu” and “Main Menu” options. Selecting that “hidden” button provided a different documentary segment (distinct from what was actually in the documentary content already) relating to that specific deleted scene and content around it in the film.

Three other minor items have sometimes been considered “Easter eggs” for this release, though I’m not sure they would count as such. If one were to leave the menu playing without selecting anything on the “Animatics and Still Galleries” or “TV Spots” menus on disc 2, each would eventually cycle to a comment from a character to urge you to actually pick something. On the former menu, Watto would urge (in Huttese with subtitles), “Hey, offworlder! Pick something or get out of my shop!” On the latter menu, Darth Sidious would appear and say, “We must accelerate our plans.” (In other words, “Hurry up and pick something already!”) A viewer could also select which planet they wanted to have appear for the disc 1 menu, which would normally just cycle through various planets. While on the FBI warning screen, pressing “1,” “2,” or “3” on a remote (usually followed by “Enter”) would cause Coruscant, Tatooine, or Naboo, to appear as the menu location.¹¹⁵

The disc’s case¹¹⁶ artwork was that of the earlier full screen VHS release, free of its earlier frame, oriented into the lower right portion of the cover, while the same logo used for the VHS release dominated the upper left. Gold bars on the top and bottom included the film’s “Every saga has a beginning” tagline and THX notice, respectively. The film disc featured an extreme closeup of Darth Maul’s face on its label, while the bonus features disc label used a shot from the Naboo duel. The insert used a mixture of character images, including Padmé, Anakin, Qui-Gon, and Obi-wan.

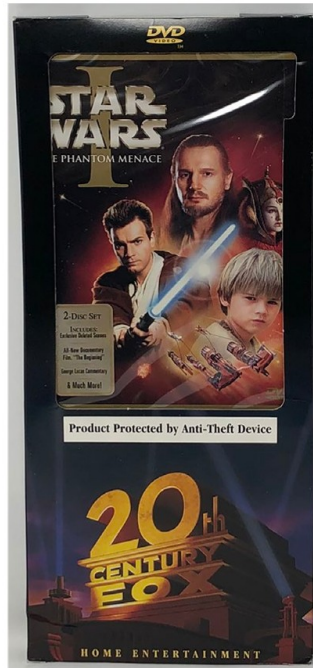
For fans of TPM, this was a mind-blowing release that took bonus features out of the typical realm of one short video featurette per VHS cassette and into the expansive universe of DVD extras. All of a sudden, anything seemed possible for inclusion on a DVD release of a *Star Wars* film, which made the call for the *Original Trilogy* on DVD all the louder. The sales numbers certainly argued for a release of the other films in the near future, as TPM became the fastest-selling DVD release in America up to that point with 2.2 million copies sold in the first week alone.

For fans seeking variants, club stores like Sam’s Club and Costco offered TPM on DVD in a variant that was specifically designed to avoid

¹¹⁵ I have also seen alternate instructions for Naboo as the “audio” button, or that Coruscant needs either “10+,” “2” twice, or “4,” but the method above works.

¹¹⁶ I should note that the typical case type for DVD and subsequent optical disc formats was typically known as a “keepcase.” I will usually just refer to these as “cases” to avoid getting into the weeds on minor variations of these “standard” case designs, except when it’s particularly noteworthy.

shoplifting. For this variant (which I call “anti-theft club packaging,” for lack of a better term), the film’s standard DVD release was placed within a longer cardboard package¹¹⁷, similar to early packaging for compact discs (audio CDs) that allowed CDs to sit in racks alongside vinyl LPs that were much larger. For this initial TPM release, it appears that only one version of this packaging existed: a generic 20th Century Fox version with a relatively dark 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment image and a standard warning (“product protected by anti-theft device”) in black text within a white box.



TPM (DVD, 2001) in anti-theft club packaging

Retailer Tower Records offered a set of five postcards with preorders for TPM on DVD. Images included two of just Maul (a full-body shot with him hooded on Tatooine and a closer shot with the villain’s hood down on Naboo); one of Qui-Gon Jinn dueling Maul on Tatooine; and two of Padmé Amidala (in her well-known red and gold attire from early in the film and the lesser-known purple outfit worn when returning to Naboo and asking Jar Jar Binks for help contacting the Gungans).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ For comparison, a typical DVD case was 5.31 in. x 7.5 in., while the usual anti-theft packaging was 5.38 in. x 12.25 in.

¹¹⁸ I have not yet acquired these, so an image of the preorder offer must suffice.



Advertisement for Tower postcard offer

This release also seemed to denote a marketing mindset that was perhaps ahead of its time. This 2001 release was available only in widescreen at first. As noted above, the gold band running along the top of the DVD case repeated the trailer line, “Every saga has a beginning,” rather than announcing the product as widescreen. This widescreen-only approach would eventually become the norm, beginning in the era of high definition (HD) Blu-ray and digital movie releases, but it may have been premature for audiences still slowly transitioning from VHS to DVD. Indeed, the lack of a full screen version would be an “oversight” corrected the very next year.

While this book is not meant to be a guide to the various changes to the films themselves over the decades, it is perhaps important to note that from this release until Disney’s acquisition of Lucasfilm, not a single live action *Star Wars* film would debut on DVD without changes made to the film itself. In the case of TPM, the DVD version expanded upon the theatrical and VHS releases by extending the podrace and reinserting a cut air taxi sequence on Coruscant, along with other minor alterations. Uncle George’s tinkering bug had been let loose for the *Original Trilogy* about half a decade earlier, and that particular genie was not to be put back into its bottle until

Lucas himself was out of the picture.¹¹⁹

Forever Tinkering:

***The Phantom Menace* on DVD (2001)**

I find myself torn on the minor changes made to the TPM DVD. The air taxi sequence adds a bit more to our first glimpse of Coruscant but proves unnecessary. The extended podrace introduction with its racers is some nice sports showmanship for the galaxy far, far away, and the podrace extension adds some solid moments, but for a sequence that is already rather long and taxing as a viewer years later, this time perhaps “less had been more.”

I tend to enjoy seeing additions to films in general and *Star Wars* films in particular, but this just felt more like filler (or bloat) than substance to me.

Meanwhile in Australia (2001)

In Australia, 2001 saw the launch of what became a small line of limited edition, widescreen DVD releases for the *Prequel Trilogy* films, through retailer EzyDVD. Disc labels were similar to their American counterparts with Australian iconography, while case art and inserts were also similar, albeit with the DVD case being clear to allow artwork on the interior as well.

What truly made these limited editions different from their standard versions in Australia were their slipcovers. In the case of TPM, the front of the slipcover used artwork similar to that of the front of the insert, while the back included an image of Theed, the film's tagline, and a “limited edition” notation with the episode number behind it.

We will see this fancier product line continue with both AOTC and ROTS.

¹¹⁹ Even then, Lucas' tinkering would bear fruit one more time after the sale of Lucasfilm in 2012. Changes made to the films during recompositing and remastering that was originally meant for 3D releases of *Episodes I – VI* emerged in 2019 on Disney+ (and in 2020 on Ultra HD Blu-ray) as the films made their way into 4K. See the chapter *All Together Now* in *Volume II*.



Attack of the DVDs and a Lonely VHS (2002)

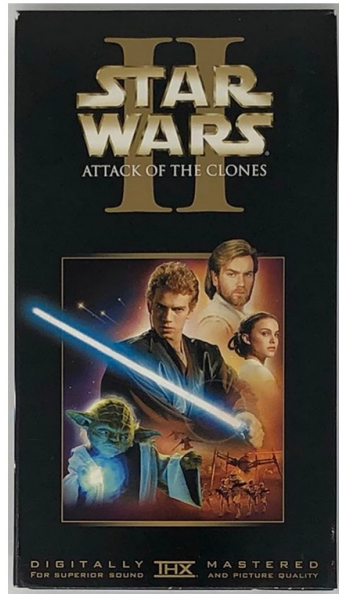
The gap between a *Star Wars* film's original theatrical release and its home video debut had been narrowing, film by film, from 1982 – 2000. 2002 was the year in which that gap narrowed to a mere six months. After blasting onto the big screen on May 16¹²⁰, *Attack of the Clones* arrived on VHS and DVD on Nov. 12 of the same year.

The American home video market was still caught up in the transition from VHS to DVD, but by 2002, the writing was on the wall. VHS was a dinosaur stumbling toward extinction, while DVD was the product of a new era of crisper picture, more dynamic sound, and veritable avalanches of bonus features.

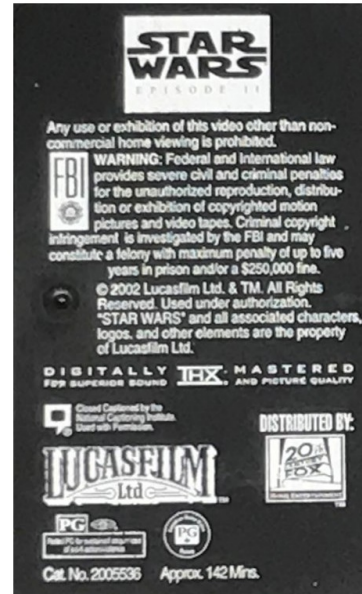
The VHS version of *Attack of the Clones* was released in the U.S. in a single format: full screen. It was already assumed that those who preferred widescreen presentations were making the jump to DVD, so for the first time since 1990, a *Star Wars* film was released on VHS in only one of the common aspect ratios. While this release was often dismissed as unnecessary in light of its DVD counterparts, the VHS release was noteworthy at the time. For those without DVD players, it provided the

¹²⁰ That day will forever be a turning point for me, as it was the day I went to see a midnight premiere of AOTC then came home and recorded my first podcast episode (before the term “podcast” existed, so we called it an “internet radio show” back then). I spent 18 years as a *Star Wars* podcaster, only retiring in 2020.

first (and, as it would turn out, only) set of deleted scenes to be found on a *Star Wars* VHS release (albeit only six compared to the DVDs' eight). Most notably, though, it included a short featurette called *Star Wars Connections with C-3PO and R2-D2* in which the droids discussed how the events of the five films thus far connected to form one saga of the Skywalkers.¹²¹ This featurette was exclusive to the VHS release. (These bonus features were the reason why the VHS, when still in shrink wrap, bore a sticker that proclaimed it to be a "Special Edition VHS.")



AOTC (VHS, 2002)



Label

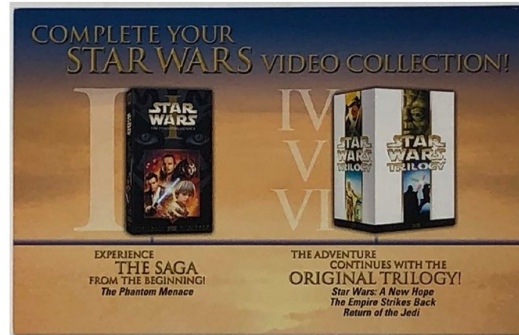
As noted earlier, the VHS cassette came in a black case, disrupting what had seemed to be an alternating black/white pattern set up in 2000. Perhaps there was no point in continuing the pattern anyway. AOTC would be the last *Star Wars* film to see VHS release in the United States. The case artwork was similar in style to the VHS releases of 2000: the film's logo above a rectangular image in a gold frame and then the THX information. Artwork this time featured Anakin (whose lightsaber broke through the frame), Yoda, Separatist droids, Padmé, and Obi-Wan (whose head broke through the frame). The cassette label was again printed directly onto the cassette, this time with the divot on the left and text indented to avoid being disrupted. Also within the package for new copies was a small advertising card that promoted TPM and AOTC on DVD on one side and the VHS

¹²¹ A *Skywalker Saga*, if you will...

releases of TPM and the *Original Trilogy* from 2000 on the other.



Advertisement card (DVD side)



Advertisement card (VHS side)

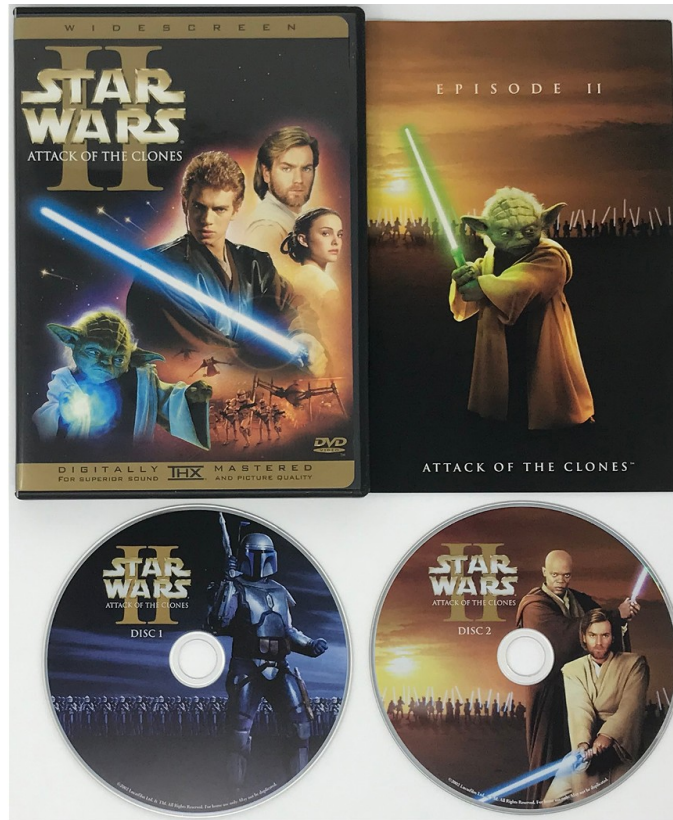
Of course, the “best” way to enjoy *Attack of the Clones* at home in 2002 was on DVD. This time around, two DVD versions were released, one widescreen in gold-trimmed packaging and one full screen in blue-trimmed packaging. This tossed out the silver (platinum?) widescreen and gold full screen approach of 1997, which would return briefly (2004 – 2005), and replaced it with a new gold/blue approach that would apply to all three prequels, the *Original Trilogy* in 2006, and both trilogies (sort of) in 2008.¹²²

Like *The Phantom Menace*’s 2001 DVD launch, AOTC’s releases were two-disc affairs, featuring the film with an available audio commentary on disc 1 and numerous bonus features on disc 2. These bonus features included *From Puppets to Pixels*, *State of the Art*, *Films are Not Released: They Escape*, *Episode II Visual Effects Breakdown Montage*, featurettes (3), web documentaries from the official *Star Wars* website (12), deleted scenes (8, 2 more than VHS), still galleries (production photos, one-sheet posters, and international outdoor campaign), trailers (3 teasers, the full trailer, and the “Across the Stars” music video), TV spots (4 action spots, 8 character spots), and a preview of the mockumentary *R2-D2: Beneath the Dome*.¹²³

The DVD case used the same artwork in a similar arrangement as the TPM DVD the previous year. Disc labels included elements from Japanese “bad guys” and “good guys” posters: Jango Fett with clone troopers behind him for the film disc and the duo of Obi-Wan and Mace in front of other Jedi on the bonus features disc. The film’s insert featured Yoda in front of a similar line of Jedi as the bonus features disc label.

¹²² 2008 only saw widescreen releases, but they were gold rather than silver.

¹²³ For more on the mockumentary’s DVD release, see the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III*.



AOTC widescreen (DVD, 2002)

Alongside this DVD release of *Episode II*, the “oversight” of not releasing a full screen version of *Episode I* in 2001 was “corrected” with the release of a full screen (blue packaging) version of TPM on DVD that, other than in the aspect ratio of the film itself, was identical in content to the 2001 widescreen release.

Both TPM and AOTC bore the label “full screen” in the top blue strip on their full screen packaging. While AOTC’s widescreen release simply said “widescreen” in the gold band at the top, TPM’s widescreen copies still retained the “Every saga has a beginning” tagline at the top all the way through 2008, making it the oddball alongside its prequel brethren.¹²⁴

Also of note when considering labels, the 2001 DVD of TPM, since it was the only one of its kind at the time, did not include a “widescreen” label on its first disc. When released in 2002 alongside its full screen counterpart, AOTC’s widescreen release did not either. Instead, on the 2002 full screen releases of both, the film discs were labeled as “full

¹²⁴ ROTS would receive the “widescreen” notation, just like AOTC.

screen.” The tide was turning against full screen releases as the norm, and these labels provided a hint of the normalization of widescreen home video releases to come. (Again, though, it was perhaps too soon to have labels *only* on full screen, as *Revenge of the Sith* would label discs for *both* of its versions.)



TPM full screen (DVD, 2002)



AOTC full screen (DVD, 2002)



2001 – 2002 label comparison – TPM (top)
and AOTC (bottom), widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)
Widescreen copies had no corresponding “widescreen” notation on labels.



TPM DVD case top comparison: widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)

As noted when discussing the 2001 TPM DVD release, this DVD release of AOTC also brought changes to the film, most notably added dialogue after Anakin's confession to killing the Tusken Raiders. Since the film was released in IMAX, which necessitated cutting out some content for that format, some scenes were new to IMAX viewers but not to the film. The same could be said for shots like Anakin taking Padmé's hand during their wedding with his artificial one, which were found in the digital projection version of the film in non-IMAX theaters but not in theaters still using analog copies of the film.

Forever Tinkering:

***Attack of the Clones* on DVD (2002)**

Having seen AOTC in 35 mm, digital projection, and IMAX, while it was in theaters, my experience with the varying cuts tends to blur together. That said, the main sequence that most fans associate with this home video release is the extended Tusken slaughter confession.

After ranting, "I hate them!" Anakin drops to the floor. The scene then continues where it once left off, in an addition that I both love and despise in equal measure for what it says of our protagonists.

Padmé tries to comfort Anakin, telling him that "to be angry is to be human." Yes, Padmé, humans get mad, but the guy you've been jerking around since going into "hiding" on Naboo just confessed to *mass murder*. Unless you are saying that so he will calm down and not add *you* to his body count, it is pretty irresponsible and ridiculous to basically tell the angst-ridden, revenge-driven twenty-year-old who just told you he wiped out an entire village of men, women, and *children* that it's fine because, well, to paraphrase Norman Bates, "We all [get] a little mad sometimes."

Anakin replies to her, "I'm a Jedi. I *know* I'm better than this." I loved seeing that line in the film because it showed that, while Anakin is unable to control his rage and does unspeakable things, he *knows* that what he is doing is wrong. It may be arrogant to say that he "knows" he is better than how he has acted, but the idea that he *should* be better than a killer,

regardless of what happened to Shmi, shows a self-awareness that often feels lacking in Anakin's film characterization.

I suppose I have to lean toward the DVD version of AOTC being a positive update to the film. We get the footage that some versions lacked and more, and Anakin gains a bit more humanity, even if Padmé earns herself some scorn for brushing off mass murder because she's in love and, well, he could justify his actions as payback, justice, or vengeance.¹²⁵

Speaking of digital versus film, AOTC was shot entirely digitally, which made this DVD release the very first digital-to-digital transfer from source to DVD, a landmark moment in home video history, even outside of the *Star Wars* saga.¹²⁶

Like its VHS counterpart, AOTC's DVD release included a small advertising card. Rather than advertising itself alongside TPM on DVD or advertising any VHS releases at all, this card simply advertised TPM as also available on DVD, inviting fans to “explore the saga from the beginning.”



Advertisement card

¹²⁵ Would I have been stronger than Anakin at the Tusken camp? Maybe not, but I would hope that my loved ones would have had the courage of their convictions and our shared morality after the fact to be willing to tell me that I screwed up, rather than coddle me. (It's only a movie, Nathan. It's only a movie.)

¹²⁶ This would cause problems for AOTC and ROTS when upscaling their native 1080p digital sources for 4K release in 2019. More on that in the chapter *All Together Now* in *Volume II*.

Similar to the TPM DVD release, AOTC also brought “Easter eggs.” On disc 1, entering “1138” (typically as “10+, 1, 3, 8”) on the “Options” menu accessed a gag/outtake reel, mixed in with the DVD’s production credits. (This could also be accessed directly by going to title 3 in the disc’s organizational structure.) On disc 2, upon going to the “Dex’s Kitchen and Still Galleries,” one could select “To Dex’s Kitchen,” then highlight the “Main Menu” button. Clicking left would then highlight a wanted poster behind Dex on the wall, which, when selected, provided details on the *Star Wars Want-Ads* campaign used to advertise on college campuses. While not really an “Easter egg” in my opinion, one could also influence which planet would load as the menu for disc 1 by entering “1,” “2,” or “3” (then “Enter” on most players) during the FBI warning screen to select Coruscant, Kamino, or Geonosis, respectively.¹²⁷

Club stores again offered “anti-theft,” longbox variants of TPM and AOTC. This time, there were two different approaches taken to the packaging: an updated, generic 20th Century Fox version and a film-specific version that used *Star Wars* imagery to make the packaging more appealing. TPM’s new, full screen DVD could be found in the new generic packaging (with lighter artwork and the text about the anti-theft device now in gold without a box), while widescreen copies (already available in the old generic packaging the previous year) could be found in new generic packaging or film-specific packaging bearing Maul and the “Every saga has a beginning” tagline.



TPM in anti-theft club packaging (2002)

Left to right: widescreen (generic); full screen (generic); and widescreen (film-specific)

¹²⁷ Again, I’ve seen alternate instructions for doing this, including using the “audio” button, but the method above works for me.

Both full screen and widescreen versions of AOTC could be found in generic packaging (similar to the TPM full screen release), while the widescreen version was also available in film-specific packaging that featured Yoda (from the same shot as the insert) with other characters (Anakin, Obi-Wan, and clones) in the background and the odd tagline, “Unlock the saga.”¹²⁸

AOTC in anti-theft club packaging (2002)

Left to right: widescreen (generic); full screen (generic); and widescreen (film-specific)



Meanwhile in Australia (2002)

Australia’s limited edition DVD releases for the *Prequel Trilogy* from EzyDVD continued in 2002 with a widescreen release of AOTC in the same vein as the TPM release the previous year. The case, insert, and disc labels followed the same pattern as with TPM (i.e. very similar to the U.S. with Australian iconography and a clear, rather than black, case). The slipcover used the same artwork as the American, film-specific, anti-theft packaging. The back of the slipcover presented an image from the Battle of Geonosis with the tagline, “The saga continues,” and a “limited edition” notation with the episode number behind it.

¹²⁸ I should note here that I’m making an assumption that the film-specific packaging for TPM and AOTC only applied to widescreen copies, as I have never run across a full screen copy of either movie in film-specific packaging.



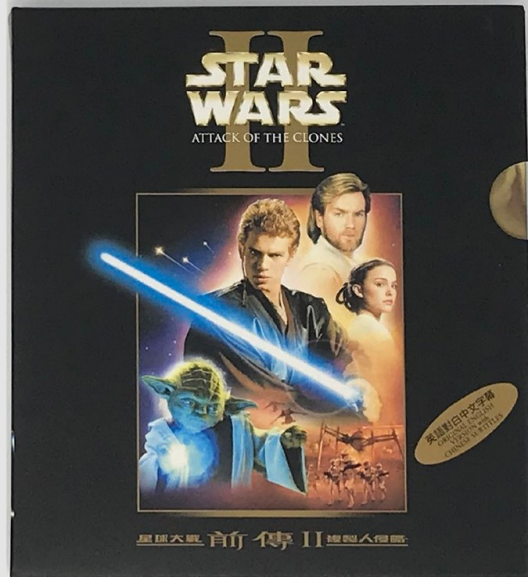
AOTC (Australian DVD, 2002) –
EzyDVD exclusive

Slipcover (back)

Meanwhile in Hong Kong (2002)

If the 2000 VCD releases of TPM in Hong Kong were a nice packaging upgrade above that year's Malaysian TPM release, the Hong Kong release of AOTC felt like a premium version of VCD packaging.

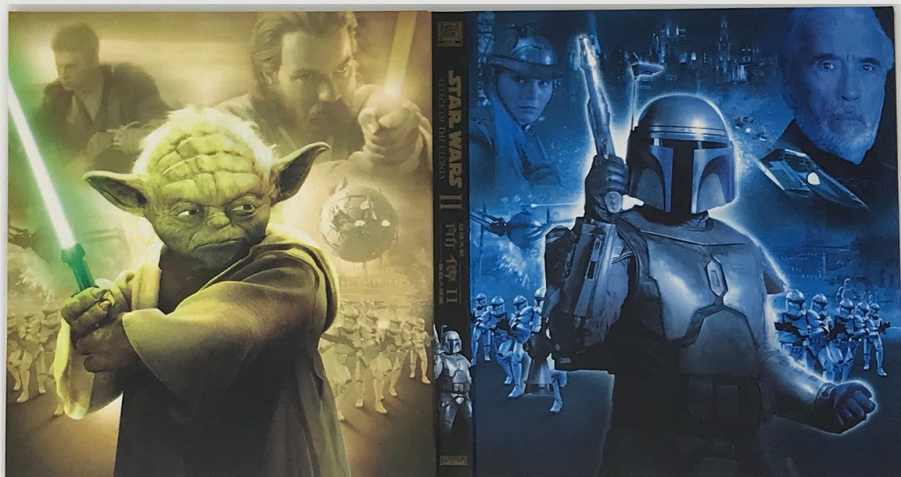
This time, both discs were placed within a nice digibook style package that featured the Battle of Geonosis beneath the discs and artwork of either Yoda or Jango Fett, depending on the side, on the reverse. The Yoda art was essentially the same as that on the American, film-specific, anti-theft packaging or Australian EzyDVD exclusive's slipcover. The Jango side used a similar approach with Dooku and Zam Wesell over Jango and clones behind him. This small album then closed and was held within an outer slipcover with a small, half-circle area cut from the open side to allow the inner book to be removed easily. The package itself was about the size of a standard jewel case, albeit much nicer.



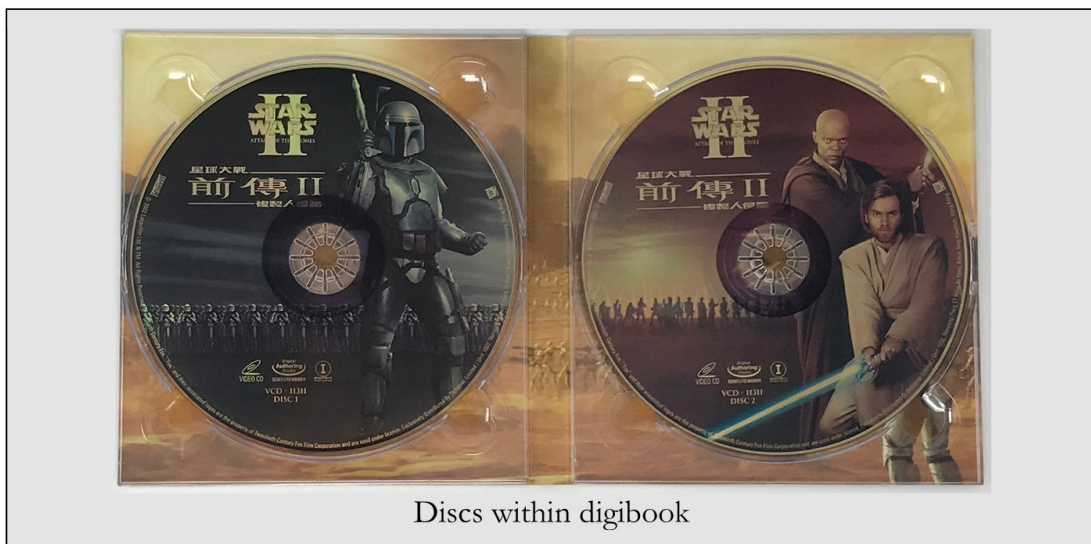
AOTC (Hong Kong VCD, 2002) – English language (i.e. subtitled) version

I am aware of one definite version of this release from Deltamac Hong Kong, which included the original English audio and Chinese subtitles. However, it is quite possible that a dubbed version also existed.

Disc labels were similar to the American DVD labels, albeit with the translated title included. The discs were rather shiny again, similar to Deltamac's approach to TPM. Slipcover art was similar to the American VHS release with the film's translated title beneath the image and a sticker noting its subtitles.



Outside of inner digibook



Discs within digibook

Meanwhile in Turkey (2002)

Another region that received VCD releases of *Star Wars* films was Turkey. Turkish DVD releases were hit-or-miss as to how well their subtitle and spoken language options actually served a Turkish-speaking audience. Often they would simply be DVDs produced for a different region that happened to have Turkish subtitles available. On the other hand, support via VCD was far more impressive. Both TPM and AOTC were released in Turkey on VCD in 2002 with full Turkish dubbing. The opening crawls were not just written in Turkish text but given voiceovers in Turkish for good measure.



TPM (Turkish VCD, 2002)



AOTC (Turkish VCD, 2002)

Both were published by Tiglon. While not something likely to be used much by an English-speaking audience, I find these fascinating both for how they catered much better to their local audience than some other foreign releases and how they differed from the approach used for technically superior DVDs in the same region.

Visually, these releases should be comfortably familiar for American audiences, as both just used the same artwork and logos (albeit in Turkish) as the American DVD releases with appropriate Turkish iconography.

We sometimes forget how lucky we are in America to be the country where Lucasfilm is based. Releases geared toward the American market are everywhere, and many foreign releases are based on ours. It is easy to forget how poorly served some regions have been in terms of *Star Wars* releases.

Two Episodes of a Trilogy Do Not a “Saga” Make (2002)

Rounding out 2002 was an odd (and arguably mischaracterized) pair of releases: the *Saga DVD Pack* and *Saga Video Pack*. In truth, these “Saga Packs” were not even full trilogy packs. They included the full screen DVD and VHS releases, respectively, of only TPM and AOTC. The regularly-packaged DVDs and VHS cassettes were simply put into a cardboard slipcover with art from each and sold as sets. Notably absent a widescreen

version (at least in the U.S.) and obviously not a full *anything*¹²⁹, let alone a full “saga” of any kind, fans tended to deride this release as an obvious cash grab, but one could argue that *any* new release was a grab for cash (since profit drives companies), and for those who did not yet own TPM and still preferred full screen, this was an easy way to catch up on the prequels in 2002 in one swift stroke.¹³⁰



Saga DVD Pack (DVD, 2002)



Saga Video Pack (VHS, 2002)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2002)

While Americans had a fixation with having DVD releases in both full screen and widescreen, the UK saw releases primarily in widescreen. As such, when the *Star Wars* films began seeing DVD release, only widescreen versions were available. This meant that when the UK had their own version of the *Saga DVD Pack*, it included widescreen copies (i.e. their only

¹²⁹ On the other hand, since ROTS would not get a VHS release in the U.S., Alexander McDonald rightly quipped on my YouTube channel that “to be fair, the VHS version is technically the complete [prequel VHS] collection.” Touché!

¹³⁰ Oops! Wrong trilogy.

versions) of TPM and AOTC, making them a better representation of the films than the American *Saga DVD Pack* that was available only in full screen.



Saga DVD Pack (UK DVD, 2002) – Notice that these were widescreen copies, and AOTC did not need a bar across the top to note its format because widescreen was the only format available for DVD in the UK.

I should note, while on the subject of AOTC in the UK, that the film itself was slightly edited for home video release in the UK in order to remove a couple of seconds from Obi-Wan's fight with Jango on Kamino, such that Jango headbutting Obi-Wan was removed. (All the rest of the violence was fine, but a headbutt? Scandalous, apparently!¹³¹)

Meanwhile in Australia (2002)

We should also note that while other regions also sometimes saw release of these two-packs, widescreen vs. full screen was not the only common variation. In Australia, for example, VHS copies of the films (in full screen this time) came in clamshell cases that were larger than their American, cardboard-slipcovered counterparts. As such, the Australian *Saga Video Pack* was a bit larger (4.75 in. x 8.06 in. x 2.63 in.) than its American equivalent (4.25 in. x 7.56 in. x 2.25 in.), very much like what we saw with the Fox Video *Original Trilogy* VHS set in 1992.

¹³¹ But, frankly, given how the MPAA rates movies in the U.S. in what often seem arcane ways, perhaps an American like me shouldn't throw stones on this one.



See It Again... For the First Time... Again? (2004)

By 2004, fans were in an uproar, pleading for the *Original Trilogy* to make its way to DVD. At that point, many did not care whether the versions to be released would be the original versions we had known prior to 1997 or the *Special Editions* that tweaked the saga (for both good and ill) seven years earlier. We simply wanted DVDs of *Episodes IV – VI*.

The *Original Trilogy* finally arrived on DVD on Sept. 21, 2004. The films had all been rescanned in 1080p resolution, then presented in standard definition on DVD.¹³² This release came with even more alterations to the films beyond those found in the 1997 *Special Editions*. These changes sometimes fixed errors found in previous cuts, sometimes created new errors (such as Luke's lightsaber color in ANH), and at times introduced new elements that entirely replaced old ones, such as an updated version of Vader's conversation with Palpatine (now played by Ian McDiarmid) in TESB and the replacement of Sebastian Shaw with Hayden Christensen (for some damned reason) as Anakin's Force ghost in ROTJ.

Forever Tinkering:

The Original Trilogy on DVD (2004)

Most of the changes for the 2004 DVD release of the *Original Trilogy*

¹³² What that all means will be discussed in the next chapter, *The Lucas Films in HD*. The key thing to note for now is just that this 1080p scan was done for the 2004 DVDs, *not* for the 2011 Blu-rays.

seem fairly neutral to me. They appear to have been made to connect with the *Prequel Trilogy* and to tweak minor visual elements.

Did we need the labels on the tractor beam generator to be in Aurebesh instead of English? Did the detention level need its hallway extended? Did minor continuity errors like flipped rank insignia or Han's vest/shirt issue in TESB need to be fixed? They were certainly nice improvements, but they weren't exactly things anyone was particularly concerned about.

In some cases, changes further tweaked alterations made for the 1997 *Special Editions*, such as updating Jabba's look in ANH and having Greedo shoot first by a narrower margin. These were welcome changes for me, given that we were "stuck" with the new scenes, which were now slightly less abrasive to critics.

When large changes were made to connect with the prequels, though, they stood out for this release. The addition of Naboo to the final celebration sequence was a nice touch (though we could have done without "Weesa freeeeeeee!"). The removal of unmasked Anakin's eyebrows and change of his eye color to match Hayden Christensen provided some stronger continuity. A new version of the conversation between Vader and Palpatine in TESB, while sounding awkward to those of us who grew up with the previous version, worked well enough.

That said, I doubt I will ever agree that replacing Sebastian Shaw with Hayden Christensen as Anakin's Force ghost at the end of ROTJ makes any logical sense, no matter how many retcons are offered to explain it away.

Interestingly, one major legacy of this release has often been overlooked. During the new 1080p scan of the films, George Lucas supervised digital cleaning and recoloring of the films. That recoloring went somewhat awry, resulting in things like Luke's incorrect lightsaber color in ANH and other issues (such as Leia being particularly pink-faced during the Battle of Yavin, thanks to magenta issues). This was exacerbated when the 1080p scans were later used for the 2011 Blu-rays. The issue was not fixed until the films were scanned all over again for 3D conversion, which led to the 4K releases that finally arrived via Disney+ in 2019 and Ultra HD Blu-ray in 2020. It was during *this* round of tinkering, not the tinkering for Blu-ray, when these color issues began.

In the end, these new cuts of the films felt like refinements of the *Special Editions* more than full revisions like in 1997.



The Original Trilogy (DVD, 2004 – 2005) – widescreen (left) and full screen (right)
These discs, inserts, and cases were included in both the 2004 and 2005 boxed sets.

The 2004 DVD release was found only in boxed sets and available in either widescreen or full screen, which returned to the silver/gold dynamic of 1997 despite the gold/blue precedent already having been set for DVD in 2002. Each film received its own DVD case that was slipped into an inner box that showed the *Millennium Falcon* chased by TIE fighters on one side and an X-wing chasing a TIE fighter on the other, beneath the “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” tagline. This inner box was then held inside a slipcover with Vader on one side and an homage to the original film’s style A poster art on the other. Each film included an audio commentary on its disc.

Individual disc cases used artwork designed similarly to the look of the TPM and AOTC DVDs in the preceding years, but these used new artwork based on various existing images, rather than using the same art as the most recent VHS releases. ANH artwork featured Luke, Leia, Han, and Obi-Wan, alongside the Death Star and X-wings. TESB artwork featured Yoda, Lando, Darth Vader, and Boba Fett with an Imperial Star Destroyer, TIE fighters, and AT-ATs. ROTJ artwork featured Luke, Palpatine, Vader, and Yoda, along with the second Death Star, *Millennium Falcon*, and TIE fighters. Like the outer packaging, silver bands on the top and bottom of each cover, along with silver usage in cover iconography, denoted widescreen copies of the films, while gold indicated full screen.

Disc labels used existing poster artwork with the film’s logo and brief legalese. These were the same imagers used for the earliest VHS (et al) package artwork: Tom Jung’s style A poster for ANH; Roger Kastel’s style A poster for TESB; and Kazuhiko Sano’s style B poster for ROTJ. The film

logos on disc labels designated whether a copy was widescreen or full screen by using either silver or gold themed logos, respectively, rather than actually stating the format on either.

Inserts provided information about each film's release and used artwork on the other side, which included that film's episode number as a Roman numeral in silver (widescreen) or gold (full screen). Insert images included Luke and Leia with Vader looming behind them (ANH), Vader alone (TESB), and X-wings attacking the Death Star II (ROTJ).



Full screen (left) and widescreen (right) Vader side of outer slipcover (top) and textless side of inner box (bottom)



Full screen (left) and widescreen (right) "poster" side of outer slipcover (top) and text side of inner box (bottom)

Rather than each film receiving a separate disc of extras, the 2004 sets included a separate disc (in its own case) labeled as "Bonus Material." This bonus disc is most well-known for including the fantastic documentary *Empire of Dreams*, but it also contained a preview of *Revenge of the Sith* (*The Return of Darth Vader*), featurettes (3), video game and still galleries, numerous trailers and TV spots for each film, and a playable demo of the original *Battlefront* video game (released the same day) for those who inserted the disc into their Xbox gaming consoles.¹³³

¹³³ I should clarify here, since the names of the Microsoft game consoles can be confusing if not part of the gaming community, that this was the *first* Xbox video

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



Bonus Material disc – widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right)



Label comparison: widescreen (left) vs. full screen (right) – Notice that neither label indicated format beyond the use of silver or gold coloration.

game system (2001), home to games like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

For a More Digital Age (2019)

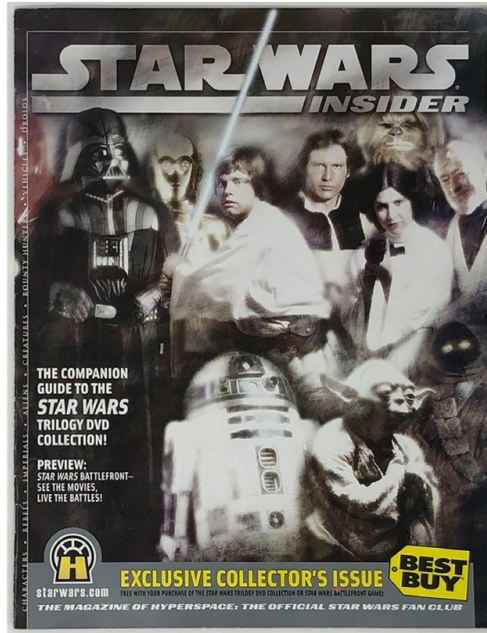
To date, *Empire of Dreams* has never seen its own separate, physical home video release (outside of screeners of the truncated, 90-minute version that aired on A&E, which were not meant for retail¹³⁴). However, the special was included at launch on Disney+ on Nov. 12, 2019. This was a *third* version of the special. Whereas the version on the 2004 bonus features DVD was approximately 2.5 hours in length, and the version presented on television via A&E was only 1.5 hours, the version on Disney+ was close to the DVD runtime and bore a note that indicated that it had been edited for content. The Disney+ version was also presented in high definition. Lastly, it included a single “extra” feature: a two-minute clip from the documentary.

“Easter eggs” on this set were similar to what could be found on the TPM and AOTC DVD releases. On the “Bonus Material” disc, one could navigate to the “Video Games and Still Galleries” menu, then enter “1138” (as “11, 3, 8,” with “11” often entered as “10+, 1”). Entering “11” would highlight a light next to R2-D2, but it would not be accessible yet. After entering the “3” and “8,” which kept the light highlighted, another gag reel intercut with the DVD production credits would play. (This could also be found by going to title 38 in the DVD’s organizational structure.) While not really “hidden” bonuses, entering the numbers “1,” “2,” or “3” (followed by “Enter”) on a remote control during the FBI warning screen on any of the film discs also allowed control over which planet would appear as the menu. For ANH, the numbers selected Tatooine, the Death Star, or Yavin IV. For TESB, they selected Hoth, Dagobah, or Cloud City on Bespin. For ROTJ, they selected Tatooine, the Death Star II, or the forest moon of Endor.

Fans who purchased this trilogy set or the *Battlefront* video game at Best Buy were also provided with an exclusive issue of *Star Wars Insider*, which featured a brief article by Steve Sansweet on the films as a cultural phenomenon, profiles of various characters and technologies of the trilogy, a preview of *Battlefront*, and a set of two-page spreads that ostensibly focused on each film’s DVD release. The DVD profiles were actually less about the DVDs themselves and more like brief glimpses at the films, including a description of each film, key moments, trivia, a list of cast/crew,

¹³⁴ See the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III*.

and the opening crawl text.¹³⁵



Best Buy exclusive issue of *Star Wars Insider* (2004)

Just like in 2001 and 2002 with TPM and AOTC, club stores like Costco and Sam's Club sold this pair of DVD sets in longboxes to prevent theft. Those variants were available once again in both generic 20th Century Fox packaging and a Darth Vader design specific to *Star Wars*. Series-specific packaging existed for both widescreen and full screen this time, and unlike the generic packaging that was only differentiated by a sticker, the series-specific packaging used the familiar silver/gold color scheme for text to indicate aspect ratio.

¹³⁵ Adam Pavlacka, one of the contributors to the magazine, reached out to me via Twitter after I covered this item on my YouTube channel. He said, "The main reason we didn't dig deeper into the DVDs themselves is that we didn't have access to them when the mag was put together."



Star Wars themed anti-theft club packaging – full screen (left) vs. widescreen (right)

Generic 20th Century Fox anti-theft club packaging – full screen (left) vs. widescreen (right)

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video *The Original Trilogy* on DVD (2004)

The DVD release of *The Original Trilogy* was one of the major DVD events of its era. To celebrate, Hasbro produced a line of three action figure packs, all exclusive to Walmart, known as the *Commemorative Trilogy DVD Collection*. These were part of the broader product line known as *The Original Trilogy Collection*. One pack was produced for each of the three films, ostensibly including three figures each time (though C-3PO and R2-D2 were bizarrely treated as a single figure for these counts).

The pack for ANH included Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, C-3PO, and R2-D2. The TESB pack included Han Solo, Leia Organa, and Chewbacca. Lastly, the ROTJ pack included Darth Vader, Emperor Palpatine, and a stormtrooper. Each package featured a logo for the film behind the figures when still inside.

Packaging was designed to resemble the widescreen DVD set with a metallic Vader helmet on the left, silver lettering, and either a Rebel Alliance symbol in the top right corner (for ANH and TESB) or an Imperial symbol (for ROTJ).

None of the figures were actually new in this round of commemorative packs. They were all minor repaints of figures that had already been released in 1995 (R2-D2), 2000 (Obi-Wan and Han), 2001 (Leia), 2003 (Luke, C-3PO, Palpatine, and Vader), or 2004 (stormtrooper). The original basis for some went back even farther than their most recent sources (e.g. one could argue that Luke and the stormtrooper had their roots in the CommTech era

of the *Power of the Force 2* product line). Perhaps most interesting, the Darth Vader figure that was repackaged in the Walmart exclusive ROTJ pack in 2004 was part of an exclusive pack (*Imperial Forces*) at Toys “R” Us the previous year.



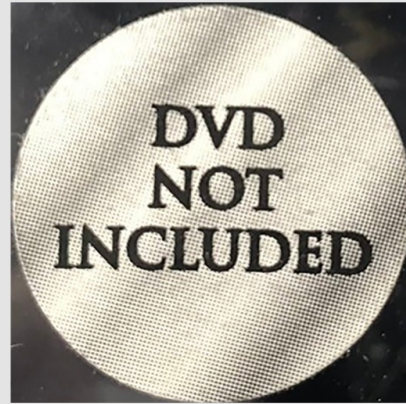
ANH Commemorative Trilogy DVD Collection (2004)



TESB Commemorative Trilogy DVD Collection (2004)



ROTJ Commemorative Trilogy DVD Collection (2004)



Sticker noting that there was *not* a DVD actually in the package

This was the beginning of a combined 32 home video release tie-in action figure products that did *not* include home video items themselves. They were celebrating a product release, not part of that release, per se, and this was made clear by a sticker on the packaging that noted, “DVD not included.”

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2004)

In the UK, the notion of producing both widescreen and full screen versions of films for release on DVD was not commonplace. However, when the *Original Trilogy* arrived on DVD in 2004, an American might have

been fooled into thinking that they had the same pair of releases as the U.S. Indeed, the silver boxed set containing widescreen DVDs did have a gold counterpart. However, that counterpart was simply an exclusive packaging variant for retailer HMV. Inside were the same silver-themed DVD cases and widescreen DVDs as in the standard, silver release.



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2004) – HMV exclusive (left) and standard (right)



ANH, TESB, ROTJ, and bonus disc cases – Notice the lack of a bar at the top to denote format, as all were widescreen with a silver color scheme.

Two other variants stood out even more. Retailer MVC (Music and Video Club) offered the standard boxed set inside a vinyl outer shell (black with a silver trilogy logo). This package also included a pack of five exclusive Super Top Trumps cards for use with the Top Trumps Specials *Star Wars: Episodes I – IV* card game.¹³⁶ The cards included: TIE Fighter

¹³⁶ Yes, the cards say I – IV, despite including characters that were from ROTJ (VI). This was likely a typo. The 2004 retail game was for IV – VI.

Pilot; Grand Moff Tarkin; Gamorrean Guard; Logray; and Biggs Darklighter.



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2004) – MVC exclusive

An even more unusual boxed set could also be found in the United Kingdom. As noted previously, this premiere version of the *Original Trilogy* on DVD brought with it a demo for the *Battlefront* video game that was released at the same time. In the UK, fans who chose to purchase both products could opt to do so quite literally in what was dubbed the *Star Wars Limited Edition Battlepack*. This was a standard DVD boxed set of the *Original Trilogy*, plus a standard Xbox copy of *Battlefront* (in its own regular case), packaged together in an outer container that featured artwork and taglines that merged the two concepts, urging fans to “live the battles” with *Battlefront* and “see the movies” with the DVD set.



Star Wars Limited Edition Battlepack (UK DVD, 2004)

Home video releases with video game demos would be commonplace for *Star Wars* in the first decade of the 2000s. Actually packaging a full video game with a *Star Wars* home video release, though, was rather unusual.

George Lucas Honored (2005)

In the mid-1990s, George Lucas was offered an opportunity to receive the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award. He turned it down, believing at the time that he was too young and had yet to contribute enough to the industry to deserve such recognition. About a decade later, when the time came for the 33rd AFI Life Achievement Award in 2005, Lucas graciously accepted.

A ceremony was held on June 9, 2005, which featured a star-studded lineup of guests to honor the man and his works. This was the event that included the infamous Carrie Fisher roast of Lucas, William Shatner singing a play on Frank Sinatra's "My Way" with stormtroopers, and musical performances by Maroon 5 (not because Lucas was a big fan but because his children were, a decision that I have always felt spoke well of him). Fans were able to celebrate as well when the ceremony aired on USA Network eleven days later on June 20.

What most fans and collectors do not know about this relatively well-known event is that certain high-tier guests were given a special gift (read: "schwag") as part of the attendee experience. This gift was a set of various George Lucas films on DVD in a frosted/clear acrylic container, emblazoned with the title *2005 AFI Life Achievement Award – A Tribute to George Lucas* on the side and a card with a large "GL" visible through the top. Inside were six regular, retail DVD releases. *Star Wars* was represented by the widescreen, two-disc releases of TPM (2001) and AOTC (2002), along with the widescreen 2004 *Original Trilogy* DVD boxed set.¹³⁷ The container also included the 2003 widescreen boxed set of *The Adventures of Indiana Jones*, a four-disc affair similar to the 2004 *Original Trilogy* DVD set and lacking *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which was still three years away. Lucas' other included works were the 1998 *Collector's Edition* DVD release of *American Graffiti* (1973) and *THX-1138: The George Lucas Director's Cut* (a revision of the 1971 film, released in 2004).

¹³⁷ A DVD release of ROTS was still a few months away.

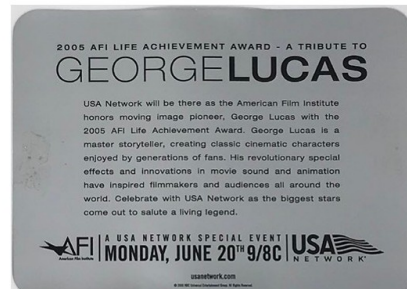


2005 AFI Life Achievement Award – A Tribute to George Lucas (DVD, 2005)

These were run-of-the-mill, retail DVD releases, packaged together in a unique container that was available only to attendees of the ceremony. The box did not include any information about the award itself beyond a short description of the upcoming USA Network broadcast of the ceremony, but all attendees were given program books that served that function.



Closed package from top
with “GL” card visible



Reverse side of “GL” card with
information about broadcast

For fans of George Lucas, this was a fantastic way to experience the cinematic journey of “Uncle George” (1971 – 2004) with what were (at the time) the strongest DVD releases of each included film.



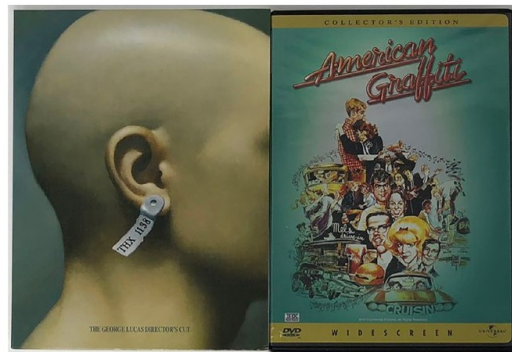
Closed package from side
(showing *Original Trilogy*
inside)



Included boxed sets – *The Original Trilogy* and *The Adventures of Indiana Jones* with J-cards attached



Included individual *Star Wars* films –
TPM and AOTC (both widescreen)



Other included films – *THX-1138*
and *American Graffiti*

This rather nice package was provided to attendees as part of a larger goodie bag. The bag itself was cream-colored with a red bottom and straps. The front bore the Kiehl's cosmetic company logo (including the usual “since 1851” beneath the company name). A Norwood luggage tag was attached to the right strap. The tag had the usual place for an attendee's identifying information on one side and the AFI logo on the other. Along with the acrylic box full of home video items, the bag included the “special 2-CD deluxe edition” CD soundtrack (2004) for ANH with a lenticular cover, a mass market paperback copy of the ANH novelization (credited as written by George Lucas but ghostwritten by Alan Dean Foster), and an action figure (still in original packaging) from the 2005 ROTS product line.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ The one I have is General Grievous, but I am unsure if everyone received

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



AFI “Goodie Bag” (closed)



ANH soundtrack (CD, 2004)



ANH novelization (paperback)



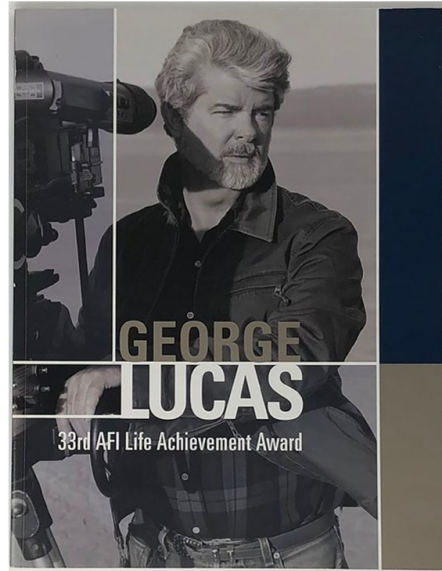
General Grievous figure (2005 ROTS line)



AFI luggage tag on “Goodie Bag”

Grievous or just a random figure.

Finding this set today is fairly difficult, though they do still tend to pop up from time to time on the secondary market.¹³⁹ The complete goodie bag with everything inside, not just the home video box itself, is extremely rare at this point. Fortunately, the only thing setting this set apart from the retail releases of each film was the container, rather than any kind of exclusive content, and all of the other items in the goodie bag (except perhaps the bag itself with its AFI luggage tag) were readily available at retail as well.



George Lucas: 33rd AFI Life Achievement Award (2005)

DVD Stands Alone (2005)

After a May 16, 2005, theatrical opening, *Revenge of the Sith* finished out the *Prequel Trilogy* on DVD with its own widescreen and full screen two-disc releases on Nov. 1 of that year. Reverting to the gold/blue widescreen/full screen color scheme of its prequel predecessors, this release again proved to be bursting with extra features.

As with the other five numbered episodes to that point, the first disc featured the film with a full-length audio commentary. The second disc brought a slew of bonus features, including *Within a Minute, It's All for Real*, *The Chosen One*, web documentaries from the official *Star Wars* website (15),

¹³⁹ I should note here that part of the difficulty in acquiring this set today, above and beyond its rarity, is that the acrylic container (which is what really makes it special) is rather fragile and often ends up cracked or even shattered during shipping.

deleted scenes (6), still galleries (production photos, one-sheet posters, and outdoor print campaign), trailers (teaser, trailer, “A Hero Falls” music video, and trailers for the video games *Battlefront II* and *Empire at War*), TV spots (15), and another playable Xbox demo, this time for *Battlefront II*.



ROTS widescreen (DVD, 2005)

ROTS full screen (DVD, 2005)

I would note here that while no *Star Wars* film prior to the Disney purchase of Lucasfilm made it to DVD without changes for its initial DVD release, ROTS was affected the least by this phenomenon. In fact, the only alteration to the film from its theatrical run to its debut on DVD was the change of a single transition.¹⁴⁰ In the theatrical version, an optical wipe carried us from Obi-Wan and C-3PO leaving Mustafar with an injured Padmé to the burned Anakin crawling along the ground. For DVD, that wipe was inexplicably changed to a standard cut. (The change would be reversed for 2011's Blu-ray release.)

Forever Tinkering:

¹⁴⁰ I've had some readers take issue with this statement, noting that Yoda's command post on Kashyyyk had its roof updated, while clonetroopers gained some dialogue when arriving on Utapau. However, these were changes (along with the returned wipe) in the *Blu-ray* version of the film, *not* DVD.

***Revenge of the Sith* on DVD (2005)**

It was a wipe that became a cut. Why should we care?

More to the point, if this was an intentional change, why did *Lucas* care?

Cover art was in a similar style to that of the other films since 2001. The film disc label used the “Darth Vader reaching toward the viewer” artwork that the U.S. knew as the “Who’s your daddy?” poster to promote ROTS on Father’s Day 2005, while the bonus features disc label showed Yoda in action. The insert used familiar Mustafar duel imagery.

As mentioned previously, this release actually marked the widescreen and full screen film discs as such, rather than marking only the full screen version. This seems to suggest (as does the continuation of releasing DVDs in pairs of widescreen and full screen options) that 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment still did not see the American market as ready to abandon full screen completely.

The discs also bore FBI anti-piracy warning messages and symbols, something that had not been present on any of the prior *Original* or *Prequel Trilogy* DVDs nor on a pair of *Original Trilogy* boxed sets later this year (probably due to those just reissuing the same discs with the same labels as 2004).



ROTS discs labeled by format – widescreen (left) and full screen (right)

Fans of “Easter eggs” could again find something entertaining on this release. On the “Options” screen for disc 1, entering “1138” (as “11, 1, 3, 8,” with “11” usually as “10+, 1”) accessed a bizarre video of Yoda dancing and rapping. (This could also be manually accessed by going directly to title 3 in the disc’s organizational structure.) Unlike for TPM and AOTC, this odd item was not intercut with the DVD’s production credits, which instead were a separate title 4. Entering the numbers “1,” “2,” or “3”

(followed by “Enter”) on a remote control during the FBI warning screen also allowed control over which planet would appear as the disc 1 menu (Coruscant, Utapau, or Mustafar, respectively).

For variant hunters, *Revenge of the Sith* was available in widescreen and full screen at Target stores in the U.S. with an exclusive, limited edition, collectible coin. The coin was held in a cardboard sleeve (featuring the same standard Mustafar duel artwork as the insert) that slid onto the regular DVD case from the bottom. The coin featured Darth Vader, the *Star Wars: Episode III* (but not *Revenge of the Sith*) title, and the phrase “limited edition” on the front, while the reverse side showed Anakin and Obi-Wan in lightsaber combat with “limited edition” and a Lucasfilm (“LFL”) copyright date of 2005.



Target exclusive version with Collector's Coin –
widescreen (left) and full screen (right)



Coin front



Coin back

Those who purchased ROTS at Walmart or Sam's Club (owned by

Walmart Inc.) could acquire a special “Bonus DVD” entitled *The Story of Star Wars* that included two (of three) video segments from 2004 – 2005 *Star Wars* VideoNow releases of the same name: *The Story of Anakin Skywalker* and *The Story of Luke Skywalker*.¹⁴¹ Packaging varied between the two sources with Sam’s Club using longer, “anti-theft” style packaging with a film-specific Mustafar theme, while Walmart simply shrink wrapped the two DVD cases together with a promotional sticker connecting them under the plastic.



Sam’s Club exclusive anti-theft packaging – widescreen (left) and full screen (right)



Walmart exclusive packaging – widescreen (left) and full screen (right)

At Best Buy, fans who were Reward Zone Members (Best Buy’s “club”) and preordered either ROTS on DVD or the *Battlefront II* video game

¹⁴¹ See the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III* for more information about *The Story of Star Wars*.

received an orange lithograph featuring Darth Vader's mask within a fold-out package that measured approx. 14.25 in. x 11.13 in. when closed. The folder's cover used the common Mustafar duel artwork with Darth Vader's helmet looming over the scene, along with the tagline, "The saga is complete."



Best Buy exclusive lithograph



Best Buy lithograph packaging

Those seeking packaging variants without any actual bonus content or items could also pick up ROTS in both aspect ratios via other club retailers like Costco in anti-theft longboxes that featured a Mustafar landscape design specific to the film.¹⁴²

¹⁴² I have yet to see to see a 20th Century Fox "generic" version of the longbox packaging for ROTS. It may exist, however, as it did for TPM, AOTC, and the 2004 *Original Trilogy* set.

ROTS (DVD, 2005) in anti-theft club packaging without bonus items – full screen (left) and widescreen (right)



One should also note that a production error caused an odd variant of this release to exist, which included the correct content on both discs but used the label for the Walmart and Sam's Club exclusive *The Story of Star Wars* DVD on the bonus features disc instead of the correct (Yoda) label.¹⁴³



A copy of ROTS on DVD with the incorrect label on the bonus features disc

¹⁴³ Again, see the chapter *A Cantina Full of Oddballs* in *Volume III*.

Even if 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment was not willing to concede that full screen was on its way out of the marketplace, it appears that the company *had* decided that VHS was a thing of the past.¹⁴⁴ While other markets (such as the United Kingdom) saw a release of ROTS on VHS, America did not. Thus, not only did *Revenge of the Sith* become the first *Star Wars* film to not see release on VHS in the United States, it also became the reason why American fans could never expect to have a full set of all six of George Lucas' films (or even just the *Prequel Trilogy*) on VHS. For collectors who had been snatching up saga VHS releases since 1982, this was a body blow. We could certainly understand it, but the completists in fandom saw (and still see) this as a gaping wound in the American *Star Wars* home video library. It also raised other questions to nag at home video collectors' minds for years to come: If CED, Beta, LaserDisc, and now even the longstanding VHS format could eventually be supplanted and phased out, just how long would DVD last, and what would eventually take its place?

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2005)

While the United States did not see a VHS release of *Revenge of the Sith*, the United Kingdom did. The most common version of this release was full screen with packaging that looked very much like the American releases of *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones* (with Vader looming in the background as Maul had for TPM) but in a clear VHS clamshell case, thereby having only one spine. For those in desperate need of a copy of ROTS to finish out their VHS collection, this was often a good "filler" release. Fans should keep in mind, though, that since this was a VHS cassette from the UK, it was a PAL release, which would not play in a standard American NTSC player.

It still looks pretty nice on the shelf, though.

¹⁴⁴ To be fair, they were not wrong for the American market. The very last major Hollywood film to be released on VHS would be *A History of Violence* on Mar. 14, 2006, a mere four months after the ROTS home video launch.



ROTS (UK VHS, 2005)



TPM (UK VHS, 2000), AOTC (UK VHS, 2002), ROTS (UK VHS, 2005) –
Yes, the UK had the full *Prequel Trilogy* available individually on VHS!

If you are hunting for a release like this, just remember that the UK may be the most common place from which collectors often import an *Episode III* VHS (probably due to English text), but wasn't the *only* place where a VHS of ROTS could be found. There are other options out there, so if you want the film on VHS, pick whatever works best for your own collection.

Across the Galaxy *Revenge of the Sith* on VHS (2005)



A few ROTS VHS releases from other regions –
Left to right: UK; Japan (rental); and Finland

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video *Revenge of the Sith* on DVD (2005)

Just as in 2004, a trio of action figure packs was released by Hasbro (as part of the *Revenge of the Sith* product line) to celebrate the 2005 DVD premiere of ROTS. Billed as the *Commemorative Episode III DVD Collection*, each included three figures and was exclusive to Walmart. This time, all three packs were numbered (out of three) and were divided by theme: Jedi Knights (Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Mace Windu); Sith Lords (Emperor Palpatine, Darth Vader, and Count Dooku); and Clone Troopers (not individually named but painted as members of the 38th Armored Division, also referred to as “Combat Engineer” troopers).



Jedi Knights Commemorative
Episode III DVD Collection (2005)



Sith Lords Commemorative
Episode III DVD Collection (2005)

Figures were a mixture of old and “new-ish.” Anakin, Obi-Wan, and

Palpatine were simply repackaged from the same year. Dooku and Vader were minor repaints of figures from 2002 and 2003, respectively. Mace was probably the most interesting of the named figures, as he was a minor repaint of the preview figure that was available in late 1998, before TPM was released the next year. This time, his original, incorrect, blue lightsaber from the preview item was replaced with a corrected, purple lightsaber. (This version was missing his cloak, though, so perhaps he had to barter his nice Jedi cloak for a proper purple lightsaber crystal.)

As for the clone troopers, these were repaints of existing or slightly reworked figures, but this was an era in which some collectors were building “armies” of clone figures for play or display, so having an opportunity to get a set of three similarly-painted clone troopers in one pack was welcomed by those in the army-building segment of figure collecting.

Packaging featured an image of the characters in a poster-esque style on the left side, along with that collection’s number out of the three available packs, while the top right side featured the film’s logo (the gold *Star Wars* logo with a darker gold “III” behind it and the film’s title in white beneath it). A small line of text beneath the product line title at the top of the packaging reminded fans, “DVD not included.”



Clone Troopers Commemorative Episode III DVD Collection (2005)



Each pack was numbered (out of three), which was unusual.

This would be the only time that a live action *Star Wars* film received three commemorative action figure packs of its own. The only other single *Star Wars* film to receive multiple commemorative packs at the same time would be 2008’s animated *The Clone Wars* film, which would receive two.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ See the chapter *Rewriting the Clone Wars* in *Volume III*.

Otherwise, these product lines tended to be multiple packs but only one pack per film.

Meanwhile in Australia (2005)

Australia's EzyDVD exclusive, limited edition DVD releases for the *Prequel Trilogy* concluded in 2005 with a widescreen release of ROTS. As before, the case, insert, and disc labels were very similar to the U.S. with Australian iconography and a clear, rather than black, case. The slipcover featured the ubiquitous Mustafar duel image that was also found on the insert, but the slipcover version of the art included Darth Vader's helmet looming over the clash. One unfortunate difference between this limited edition DVD and those previously released for *Episodes I – II* was that the film's rating information was provided via a somewhat garish blue and white sticker that stood out heavily from the artwork, whereas the previous releases had built the rating information into the films' own cover art color schemes. The back of the slipcover presented Darth Vader (pre-cybernetics) on Mustafar with the tagline, "The saga is complete," and a "limited edition" notation with the episode number behind it.



ROTS (Australian DVD, 2005) –
EzyDVD exclusive



Slipcover (back)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2005)

To briefly return to the UK for ROTS releases, we should note that retailer HMV released a slipcovered, exclusive version of ROTS on widescreen DVD in 2005 that closely resembled the Australian limited edition, exclusive version at first glance. For those seeking these releases, we should note that while the Australian version loaded from the side and

featured art on the back of the slipcover that deviated from the retail case back, the UK version's slipcover slipped on vertically and only featured variant front cover art. The back of the slipcover was essentially just a repeat of the back of the DVD package inside. For collectors, the UK and Australian versions are most easily distinguished by the ratings in the bottom left corners of their slipcovers.



ROTS (UK DVD, 2005) – HMV exclusive

Meanwhile in Hong Kong (2005)

Deltamac Hong Kong once again distributed a VCD release for ROTS. Fortunately, the disc labels this time were more standard (resembling the American DVD disc labels), instead of the rather shiny style used for TPM and AOTC. Packaging was very similar to the style of the AOTC release, but rather than proclaiming itself as having English audio and Chinese subtitles via a sticker on the front, the ROTS release simply noted this on the back.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Again, I would note that I own and can confirm the existence of this version, but a dubbed version may also have existed on the Hong Kong market.



ROTS (Hong Kong VCD, 2005) – English language (i.e. subtitled) version



Back side of inner digibook



Discs within digibook

The inner digibook leaned heavily toward Mustafar imagery. The Mustafar landscape was found beneath the two discs, while the reverse side featured the rather common Darth Vader head and Obi-Wan vs. Anakin artwork found on so many ROTS items.

All in all, the AOTC and ROTS VCD releases from Hong Kong look and feel the fanciest of the *Star Wars* VCDs I have run across.

Meanwhile in Malaysia (2005)

Of course, if I'm going to declare the Hong Kong VCDs of AOTC and ROTS to be particularly fancy when compared to other regions, it would behoove us to look at how another region or two addressed their ROTS releases. We will start with Malaysia, home to a solid *Original Trilogy* release in 2000 but a pitiful contemporary TPM release with outer packaging barely worth being called "packaging" at all. Had that changed in the intervening half-decade? Thankfully, it had.

Under a new distributor, Movie Magic Sdn Bhd, the ROTS VCD release (two discs to fit the film's runtime as usual) was presented in what looked like a standard, clear DVD case. The two discs bore art similar to the U.S. DVD release, with similar case art as well. The case in many ways resembled what might have happened to an American DVD case if much of the THX and DVD-specific labeling were removed. This case fit inside a slipcover with similar (but slightly zoomed in) artwork, which loaded from the left (instead of the right like typical American releases).

This Malaysian VCD release was available in at least one version, which included the standard, English audio track with *both* Chinese and Malay subtitles on the screen at the same time.



ROTS (Malaysian VCD, 2005) – English language (i.e. subtitled) version

Meanwhile in Singapore (2005)

Another example of interesting packaging variation could be found in Singapore. Whereas Hong Kong had gone to a digibook and Malaysia to DVD-esque packaging, Singapore went more minimalist and saw its ROTS VCD release in a single jewel case. However, the approach taken to this release will likely be surprising to American readers. Rather than opening sideways (spine to the left, opening from the right), this standard jewel case was meant to be held with the spine at the top, so that it opened upward from the bottom. (In other words, the case was rotated 90 degrees clockwise from how typical American CDs were packaged.)



ROTS (Singaporean VCD, 2005)

This was an English language release without subtitles, making it akin to watching an American full screen VHS cassette (if one had existed for ROTS).

Meanwhile in Turkey (2005)

Finally, how could we leave ROTS on VCD without returning to Tiglon's line of Turkish-dubbed releases? Like the previous two films, ROTS received a two-disc, dubbed release in Turkey. This time, the opening crawl was in English, but it included Turkish subtitles and narration. Perhaps the most notable addition to the film was the advertising that preceded it. Inserting the first disc would play about 10 min. of English language (no subtitles or dubbing) trailers for four different, unrelated films: *Kingdom of Heaven*; *Hide and Seek*; *Be Cool*; and *Elektra*.

Packaging resembled the previous releases, using the same artwork and disc labels (barring format and local iconography, of course) as the worldwide DVD releases. Both cover and disc labels noted the title in Turkish with the English title directly underneath in smaller text. A new addition was a holographic sticker on the cover, which included the Tiglon brand name and shifted between "DVD Video" and "VCD Video" logos.



Meanwhile in Bulgaria (2005)

In places like the U.S., UK, and Australia, an effort had been made to allow fans to get caught up on both of the first two *Prequel Trilogy* films in a single package back in 2002 with the oft-maligned *Saga Video Pack* and *Saga DVD Pack*. In Bulgaria, fans could pick up a set of TPM and AOTC on VHS as well, but this time it was part of an effort to promote the theatrical release of ROTJ and was acquired when purchasing prepaid cellular phones.

Yes, you read that correctly. In Bulgaria, a company called GloBul (now part of Telenor) had a line of prepaid cellular phones known as B-Connect. In 2005, purchasing one of their products could net the buyer an unusual boxed set of the full-screen, subtitled, Bulgarian VHS releases (through MayStar Film) of TPM and AOTC. The VHS cases were essentially Bulgarian variations of the same case style we've seen in the U.S. and other regions, though without THX certification information on the front. The cassettes had no labels whatsoever, though the titles (Bulgarian episode subtitle and full English name with series, episode number, and subtitle) were printed in plain text on the spines of each (which were terrifying in their own right by still having their protective tabs intact, making them easily erased by accident).

The cassettes (in their slipcases) were then held within an inner container (a box with an open top) that included an image of Yoda with his lightsaber at the Jedi Temple on one side and information about (and

pictures of) the two VHS cassettes on the other. Also inside that container were two cellular phone information booklets, both with different images of Darth Vader on their covers. One was information about the cellular product, coverage maps, etc. The other included advertisements for various backgrounds, ringtones, and simplistic games that could be purchased for phones of the era.

That inner container was then placed within a slipcover (a ring with both sides open) that featured Vader and the VHS case images on the front and included information about the product (including VHS cassette info and phone service details, including the individual phone number for that customer) on the back.



B-Connect promotional package including TPM and AOTC (Bulgarian VHS, 2005)



Slipcover (back)



Inner package (Yoda side)



Booklets: catalog of ringtones, games, etc. (left) and cellular phone plan details (right)



Included TPM and AOTC VHS releases – Notice the Bulgarian film titles and lack of THX certification information.



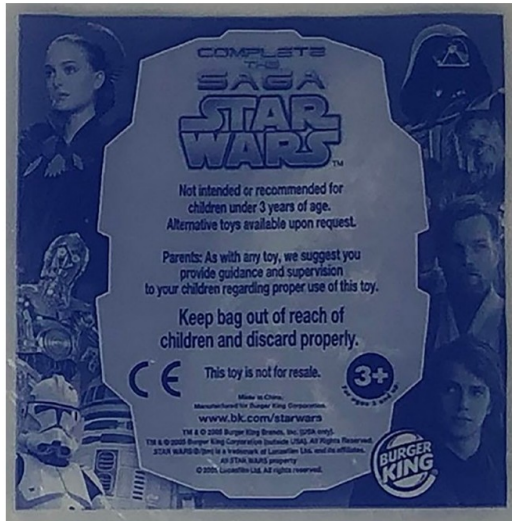
Cassette sides – Notice the labels printed in plain text and intact tabs.

This was a rather odd way to acquire the first two prequels, but if one were in the market for cellular phone service and excited for ROTS, this was an interesting way to bring those interests together if you happened to reside in Bulgaria at the time.

Before we leave the subject of the 2005 home video release of ROTS, I would be remiss if I did not also mention another promotional campaign for this release. The Burger King fast food chain promoted the DVD release of ROTS in the U.S. with their *Complete the Saga* marketing push, which included 17 *Star Wars* toys in Kid's Meals (mere months after having done so with another 31 toys had generated criticism for using meals aimed at kids to promote a movie rated PG-13), along with a set of six watches.

The toys were in the caricature style known as “Super Deformed” (AKA “Super D” or “SD” in the U.S. or *Chibi* in Japan) and came in four main categories of four items each. Four of the toys were vehicles, while the rest were characters. All came packaged in blue and clear plastic baggies with

columns of film characters on either side (Padmé, C-3PO, R2-D2, and a clone trooper on the left, with Darth Vader, Obi-Wan, Chewbacca, and Anakin on the right). A booklet with a similar cover (in color this time) included instructions for each toy type plus an offer to join the Burger King Kids Club.



Complete the Saga figure packaging



Instruction booklet with club offer

The vehicles made up the Cosmic Cruisers set (Naboo Starfighter, ARC Clone Fighter, Vulture Droid, and Snowspeeder), which were spring-loaded ships that launched forward when a plastic “key” was inserted into them and a flexible area on the key was pressed.



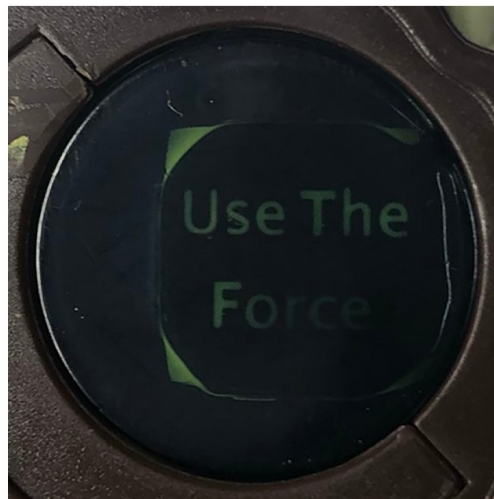
Complete the Saga Cosmic Cruisers: Naboo Starfighter (top left); ARC Clone Fighter (top right); Vulture Droid (bottom left); Snowspeeder (bottom right).

The Jedi Wisdom character toys (Mace Windu, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Kit Fisto, and Yoda) were like “Magic 8 Balls,” which could be shaken so that a die with a phrase from the character would appear through a window on the bottom of the toy.¹⁴⁷



Complete the Saga Jedi Wisdom figures

Left to right: Mace Windu; Obi-Wan Kenobi; Kit Fisto; Yoda



Complete the Saga Jedi Wisdom figure “Magic 8 Ball” example:
“Use the Force” showing through Kit Fisto’s window (bottom of figure)

Figures from the Galactic Spinners group (Anakin Skywalker, Emperor Palpatine, Luke Skywalker, and Chewbacca) had removable bottoms that revealed an inverted, dome-shaped area that rotated. A precise swipe of the

¹⁴⁷ Either these haven’t aged well, or they were terrible at the time also. These days, it’s very difficult to see the actual die, even when pressed against the window, due to the dark liquid it’s suspended within.

toy on a surface would allow it to spin like a top briefly (often *very* briefly, given how asymmetrical the toys were).



Complete the Saga Galactic Spinners figures

Left to right: Anakin Skywalker; Emperor Palpatine; Luke Skywalker; Chewbacca



Complete the Saga Galactic Spinners example:

Anakin Skywalker figure with bottom removed to reveal top-like “spinner”

A final main group of four toys was the Shadow Casters (Stormtrooper, Bail Organa, Queen Amidala, and R2-D2), which featured buttons on their backs that would activate a small red light that would project from the bottom of the figure. The light, when projected on a surface from a few inches away, would take the shape of images like an Imperial cog or

Yoda.¹⁴⁸



Complete the Saga Shadow Casters figures
Left to right: Stormtrooper; Bail Organa; Queen Amidala; R2-D2



Complete the Saga Shadow Casters projected red images from their bottoms/feet.
Examples: Imperial cog (Stormtrooper, left) and Yoda (Bail Organa, right)

The final figure to complete the set of 17 was not part of any of the four-item groups with the other toys but was most similar to the Shadow Casters. This was the limited edition Darth Vader figure, which had a button on the front as his control panel (rather than a button on the back like the Shadow Casters). Clicking the button would play his breathing/respirator sound.

¹⁴⁸ These have also not aged well. I have a set that had the original tabs still in them to block batteries from use, but upon removing the tabs, only two of the four actually still worked in 2021.



Complete the Saga limited edition Darth Vader figure

Meanwhile, each of the six watches was based on a single episode in the saga and featured a design with limited customization. Each watch's strap featured two different characters from a given film, and each half of the strap and the central watch face could be rotated to allow for eight different total configurations per watch.¹⁴⁹ Each was packaged with its instructions within a cylindrical tin, which bore the film's title and images of the two characters (one "good" and one "evil") for that particular film's watch design. Each tin's cap also featured that film's logo in a standardized style. Designs ran as follows: Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Maul (TPM); Yoda and Count Dooku (AOTC); Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader (ROTS); Luke Skywalker and a stormtrooper (ANH); Han Solo and Boba Fett (TESB); Leia Organa and Jabba the Hutt (ROTJ).

¹⁴⁹ With the watches featuring this limited form of customization, it was not surprising that Burger King described them as another means to "have it your way" in keeping with the company's long-running slogan.

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



Burger King *Complete the Saga* watches (2005) – Each came in a tin, attached to a cardboard piece to hold the watch in place, along with instructions.



Heroic tin sides



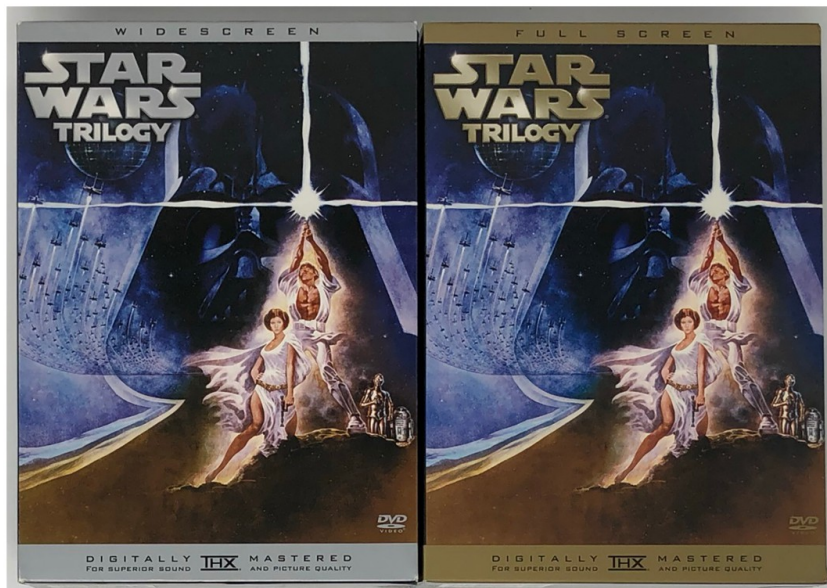
Villainous tin sides



Tin caps

No More Bonus Disc: The Cost of Bargain Pricing (2005)

One year after the *Original Trilogy* made its DVD debut, the three film discs from 2004 (in their respective cases) were reissued in another boxed set duo with a similar silver/gold color scheme for widescreen and full screen. (There were no individual releases this time either.) This pair of boxed sets, released Dec. 6, 2005, were identical in content to the 2004 set with one enormous exception: the fourth disc, which held all of the 2004 bonus content beyond audio commentaries, was entirely absent from this simplified reissue, which was marketed as a limited edition “family pack.”



The Original Trilogy (DVD, 2005) – widescreen (left) and full screen (right)

Packaging was a single slipcover to hold all three standard DVD cases without any kind of outer box as in 2004. Artwork on both front and back featured the classic Tom Jung ANH style A poster artwork with silver or

gold bands along the top and bottom to denote widescreen or full screen, respectively. The color scheme also applied to the logos and spines. This would be the last time a *Star Wars* film release would follow this classic silver/gold pattern. What few releases remained that would include full screen versions at all would stick to the gold/blue style of the prequel DVDs.

The Original... For Real This Time? (2006)

After the 1997 *Special Editions* made their way through theaters, then two subsequent VHS releases, fans had hoped that the original, unaltered versions of the *Original Trilogy* would form the basis of the films' DVD release. Frustrated to find that the 2004 DVDs (and subsequent 2005 reissues) were not only the *Special Editions* but altered again (*More Special Editions?*), the collective pleading to see the unaltered films on DVD reached a fever pitch.

Finally, it was announced that the original, unaltered versions¹⁵⁰ of ANH, TESB, and ROTJ would hit DVD on Sept. 12, 2006, but not in the way fans had hoped.

Rather than releasing a third *Original Trilogy* boxed set in just three years, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment instead reissued the three films separately in what were labeled as "limited edition" releases. (We will see one way to actually purchase all three in the same package as a store exclusive in a moment.) Available in widescreen or full screen, these were two-disc releases with something old and something even older.

Disc 1 of each was essentially a reissue of the same 2004 DVD that had been launched two years earlier and reissued in 2005.

The second disc, labeled as the "Bonus Disc," did indeed include what had been advertised (more or less): a pre-*Special Edition* version of the *Original Trilogy*, one film at a time. Fans' cries had been heard! We had gotten what we wanted!

Well, not quite.

Ire immediately rose again among hardcore *Star Wars* film enthusiasts. Many had expected restored, anamorphic widescreen versions of the films that were on visual par with those found on the main discs (just, y'know, with all the changes from 1997 onward yanked out somehow). The reality was rather different. The "unaltered" films were based on the THX

¹⁵⁰ Such original, unaltered theatrical versions are often referred to by fans as the "GOUT," which stands for "George's Original Unaltered Trilogy." An unfortunate acronym, to be sure.

remastered “masters” that had been created for 1993’s *The Definitive Collection* LaserDiscs and were subsequently used for the 1995 *THX Remastered Edition*. Aside from scanning a decent film copy to replace the opening of *A New Hope* with a crawl that lacked its episode number or subtitle (something that had never happened for a full-length release of the film on home video¹⁵¹), these “unaltered” versions were essentially just the 1993 versions of the films. Moreover, due to their source, they were *letterboxed* widescreen (even in the full screen package, since that referred only to the first disc), rather than anamorphic, an issue that rankled then and has continued to do so with the proliferation of HD and Ultra HD televisions.¹⁵²

While very close to the original version of the trilogy, this presented an issue with calling these “unaltered,” as fans and reporters often called them, perhaps owing to stickers on case fronts (or shrink wrap) and disc stats on case backs that claimed that each included both the “digitally remastered” film and the “original theatrical version.” (Official press releases instead said that the releases would “capture [the films] original theatrical presentation,” which provided a bit more logical wiggle room). By being based on the 1993 masters, these were actually the second home video versions of TESB and ROTJ. For ANH, these were based on the third home video version of ANH (minus the opening), or (taking the opening into consideration) a new version of the film. Sure, it was nitpicking, but we’re fans. That’s what we do.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Why hadn’t ANH had a full-length home video release without the subtitle? They all came too late. After the theatrical premiere (without a subtitle) on May 25, 1977, the movie was re-released (with C-3PO’s tractor beam dialogue restored) on July 21, 1978, then re-released a second time on Aug. 15, 1979. The subtitle was finally added for its *third* re-release (and *fourth* time in theaters overall) on Apr. 10, 1981, so that it would match TESB, which had premiered with its subtitle on May 21, 1980. That cut it close, but with the first full-length home video release of ANH not arriving until 1982, the subtitle was already firmly in place by the time it saw VHS, LaserDisc, CED, and Beta release.

¹⁵² To be fair, disc information on packaging clearly stated that the “original theatrical version” was “presented in widescreen 4:3 letterbox format (Aspect Ratio 2.35:1).” We *did* have a way of knowing what we were getting before purchase.

¹⁵³ Out of love, to be sure.

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



ANH widescreen (DVD, 2006)



ANH full screen (DVD, 2006)



TESB widescreen (DVD, 2006)



TESB full screen (DVD, 2006)



ROTJ widescreen (DVD, 2006)



ROTJ full screen (DVD, 2006)

In the end, the 2006 release became a sort of “be careful what you wish for” moment for fans.¹⁵⁴

One relatively uncontroversial aspect of the bonus discs for each film this time around was that each included an Xbox demo for *LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*.

Visually, case artwork had changed substantially from 2004 – 2005, while disc labels were also new but not as drastically altered. Similar to the previous releases, front cover art included bars on top and bottom with the film’s logo on the upper left of the artwork in between the bars. The bars themselves were now gold/blue like the prequel films, though while the bottom bar of THX information resembled the prequel releases, the top bar not only listed “widescreen” or “full screen” but also labeled each as a “limited edition.” Regardless of format or color scheme, each film’s logo was themed in gold like the 2004 – 2005 full screen releases. Artwork was more dynamic (in my opinion) and intentionally designed as homages to classic poster artwork, the original version of which was found on the back alongside disc information. The posters that inspired the covers were Thomas Chantrell’s ANH style C poster, Tom Jung’s 1982 theatrical re-release poster for TESB, and Kazuhiko Sano’s tried and true style B poster for ROTJ.

¹⁵⁴ When choosing to watch the films on these bonus discs, perhaps most fans echo the line from Jannah in TROS: “It’s an oh-six, but it should work.” (To this day I wonder if that was an intentional reference, but I highly doubt it.)

Labels for the first disc of each release (the 2004 cuts), which retained the same art as 2004 – 2005, were updated so that both full screen and widescreen versions bore the type of gold logo that had previously been found on full screen versions (with widescreen versions previously having silver logos), similar to the switch to gold-only for logos on the case artwork. The term “full screen” or “widescreen” now sat above the logo, while “Disc One” was stated below. Next to the logo, each label now also bore an FBI anti-piracy warning message and symbol.



Disc label comparison: 2004 – 2005 (left) vs. 2006 – 2008 (right)
Note that widescreen film discs (like this one) switched from silver to gold logos.

Labels for the new bonus discs also used existing poster art as their sources. ANH used art from the bottom left corner of the Japanese “dubbed” re-release poster by Noriyoshi Ohrai. TESB used the German style A poster art by Siegfried Groß. ROTJ used the classic teaser poster art (best known for posters bearing the title *Revenge of the Jedi*) by Drew Struzan, complete with its incorrect lightsaber colors for Luke and Vader.



Bonus disc labels – Note that bonus disc content and labels were the same, regardless of whether the package was widescreen or full screen.

Inserts also played homage to classic film posters with ANH resembling the style D poster art by Drew Struzan and Charles White III, TESB using elements from the style B poster art found in regions like Japan, and ROTJ using elements based on Josh Kirby's international style A poster art from regions like the UK.

For those seeking variants, the U.S. had a few retailer exclusives. The best known of these exclusives was the one that offered the closest thing to a “boxed set” for this year’s releases. At Best Buy, fans could purchase a package of all three widescreen (but not full screen) films, within their normal packaging, inside a collector’s tin. The cover of the tin was based somewhat on Thomas Chantrell’s style C ANH poster art, but with major alterations. Han, Luke, and Leia carried over from the original, along with Obi-Wan and Tarkin to their left and Chewbacca, C-3PO, R2-D2, and an X-wing passing through an explosion on the right. Behind them, Darth Vader was redone, as was the Death Star (which seems just horizontally flipped to my eyes) and ships behind him. To expand the cover art to make sense for a trilogy set, Yoda was added below Tarkin, and Wicket was added above R2-D2. The cover then featured the *Star Wars Trilogy* logo below Luke, above a set of three film logos (each film’s title with a silver Roman numeral for their episode number behind them). The back of the tin featured a logo for each film beside the same poster artwork for each film that was used for the back of each individual DVD case. Strangely, at least when compared to most other regions of the world, the American tin opened from both front and back, making the sides, top, and bottom into a sort of metal “ring” from which the two sides folded outward.



The Original Trilogy (DVD, 2006) –
Best Buy exclusive



Tin (fully opened from both sides
with disc cases removed)

Walmart stores sold the widescreen (but again not full screen) version of

each film in a special, wide, cardboard package that included the film (in its regular packaging) and a copy of the film's original comic adaptation, featuring an exclusive variant cover based on an early Marvel Comics cover from the adaptation. These comics were normal size, rather than smaller, digest-sized comics as the packaging led some fans to believe. For ANH, this was the Marvel Comics adaptation that began in Mar. 1977 (*Star Wars* #1 – 6), as reprinted by Dark Horse Comics as *Classic Star Wars: A New Hope*.¹⁵⁵ Its cover was a recreation of the cover of the original *Star Wars* #1. The TESB adaptation was the 1980 Marvel version (*Star Wars* #39 – 44, reprinted by Dark Horse as *Classic Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*) with a cover that resembled that of Marvel's early collected versions. The ROTJ adaptation was again the original Marvel version from 1983, first presented as the *Return of the Jedi* mini-series #1 – 4 and later reprinted by Dark Horse as *Classic Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. Its cover resembled its collected version in *Marvel Super Special* #27 (1983). I am inclined to believe that this strange choice for the comics' covers was to drive comic book collectors to this release in search of variant covers, just as those seeking the movies could be drawn to this variant due to the pack-in comics.



ANH (DVD, 2006) –
Walmart exclusive

¹⁵⁵ This was a bit odd, given that Dark Horse had published an entirely new adaptation of ANH in 1997 that was closer to the actual film and incorporated *Special Edition* changes.

TESB (DVD, 2006) –
Walmart exclusive



ROTJ (DVD, 2006) –
Walmart exclusive

One has to wonder, though, if Dark Horse Comics (the *Star Wars* comic licensee at the time) was a bit annoyed over this release. While the comics inside were Dark Horse reprints and branded as such with all Marvel references removed from their covers, the images next to the DVD case pictures on the outer boxes were all the original Marvel covers, complete with all of the Marvel branding that entailed. Collectors seemed to have mostly expected the actual comics to be branded by Dark Horse, not Marvel, due to the former having the rights at the time and having released plenty of these reprints already, but surely Dark Horse couldn't have been happy about a packaging design that promoted the previous (and, unbeknownst to them at the time, future) licensee.¹⁵⁶

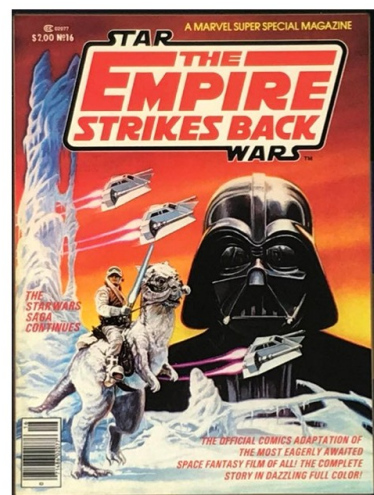
¹⁵⁶ Marvel was the original *Star Wars* comic licensee, producing an ongoing series from 1977 – 1986, along with series based on *Droids* (1986 – 1987) and *Ewoks*



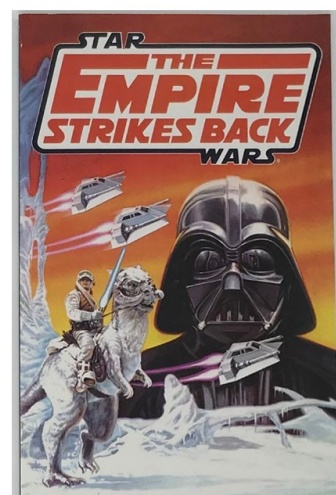
ANH comic shown on packaging



Actual ANH comic



TESB comic shown on packaging

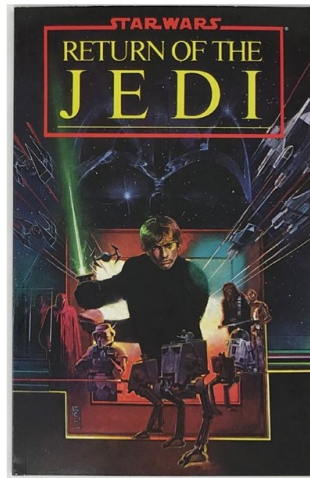


Actual TESB comic

(1985 – 1987) through their Star Comics (i.e. “kiddie” comics) imprint. Dark Horse then became the licensee, producing numerous series from 1991 – 2014. Marvel then became the current licensee (along with IDW), beginning with new series that launched in 2015. It was announced in Nov. 2021 that Dark Horse would become a licensee for *Star Wars* comics again in 2022 after over 7 years away from the saga. They will be producing comics alongside Marvel and IDW.



ROTJ comic shown on packaging



Actual ROTJ comic

Much less controversial in retrospect were other retailer exclusives. Target included small (approx. 7.13 in. x 4.75 in.) concept art prints within the DVD cases. The art in question was the same used for the covers of the trilogy's three *The Art of...* books: a TIE fighter chasing an X-wing during the Battle of Yavin for ANH; a snowspeeder flying over an AT-AT during the Battle of Hoth for TESB; and Luke during the speederbike chase on the forest moon of Endor for ROTJ.



Target exclusive indicator



Target exclusive concept art prints

Now-defunct Circuit City offered individual lithographs in folders (similar to how Best Buy handled its ROTS lithograph, albeit vertically this time). The artwork for each film's lithograph was the same poster art used for the back covers and as inspiration for the front covers for this 2006 DVD release (noted above). These were relatively large items, measuring about 11.13 in. x 14.25 in. when closed. Folder fronts were relatively simple with just the film's logo and "limited edition collectible lithograph." The back of each folder used elements from classic posters, reworked into folder artwork: the ships and Death Star from Noriyoshi Ohrai's Japanese

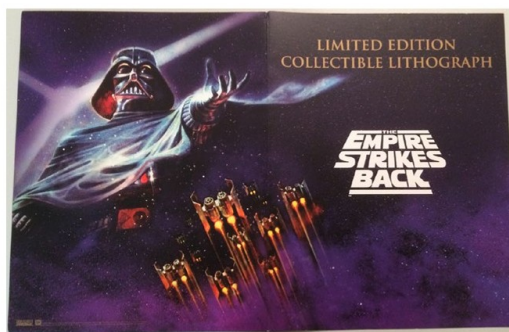
“dubbed” poster for ANH (missing the bottom left section with characters that became the ANH bonus disc label for this product line, noted above); Vader and TIE bombers from Tom Jung’s style B poster for TESB; and the same teaser art by Drew Struzan as that used for the bonus disc label for ROTJ. While the ANH folder leaned more toward a blue color scheme, TESB and ROTJ leaned more toward purple.



ANH Circuit City lithograph folder



ANH Circuit City lithograph in folder



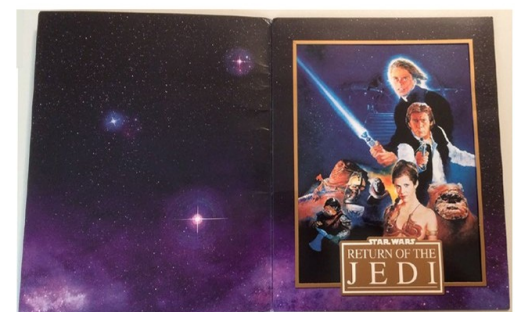
TESB Circuit City lithograph folder



TESB Circuit City lithograph in folder



ROTJ Circuit City lithograph folder



ROTJ Circuit City lithograph in folder

Meanwhile, the next great transition for the saga in the living room was on the horizon. While a physical high definition release of the live action films was still five years away, the saga premiered in HD on Cinemax just

two months after the Sept. 12 limited edition DVD reissues.¹⁵⁷

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video *The Original Trilogy* on DVD (2006)

The 2004 premiere of *The Original Trilogy* on DVD had been cause for celebration, leading to the first Hasbro commemorative action figure packs to coincide with a *Star Wars* home video release. The 2005 reissue of the films on DVD had not resulted in a similar release (either because they were not as noteworthy or perhaps because that year already had *seven* such packs between ROTS and the *Clone Wars* micro-series¹⁵⁸). Now that the films were being released again, this time with the “unaltered” cuts included, Hasbro deemed it time for another round of celebratory, Walmart exclusive action figure packs. This round was part of what was known as *The Saga Collection*.



Commemorative Episode IV
DVD Collection (2006)



Commemorative Episode V
DVD Collection (2006)

Packaging this time was more akin to that of the ROTS packs than the last time the *Original Trilogy* films merited figure packs. Poster-style images graced the left side of each film’s packaging design, while the film’s logo (a silver *Star Wars* logo with a silver Roman numeral behind it and title in white below it) adorned the top right corner. Each pack was dubbed the *Commemorative Episode [IV, V, or VI] DVD Collection*, similar to the title of the ROTS sets one year earlier. The “DVD not included” reminder was

¹⁵⁷ We’ll look at what these Cinemax (and later television) versions actually were in the chapter *The Lucas Films in HD*.

¹⁵⁸ See the chapter *Genndy Goes Micro* in *Volume III* for details on the latter.

found beneath the item title.



Commemorative Episode VI DVD Collection (2006)

The ANH pack included Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, and Obi-Wan Kenobi. The TESB set included Han Solo, Chewbacca, and a stormtrooper. Even though all three packs were ostensibly packages of three figures each, the ROTJ package included C-3PO and R2-D2, alongside Emperor Palpatine and Luke Skywalker. Just like in 2004, the droid duo was treated as if they were a single action figure.

Most of the figures were simply minor repaints. These came from 2000 (Han), 2001 (Chewbacca), 2002 (Obi-Wan and Vader), and 2003 (ANH Luke, though one could make a case for the roots of this figure going back to 1999), 2004 (ROTJ Luke, R2-D2, C-3PO, and stormtrooper). Palpatine was a repackaging of the same figure released separately the same year.

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2006)

Fans who purchased the “limited edition” versions of the *Original Trilogy* films in the UK had the option of doing so at Woolworths, where doing so would provide an extra bonus: an exclusive Darth Vader action figure on a card meant to recreate the packaging style of the 1978 Darth Vader action figure from Kenner when reissued during the 1980 – 1983 TESB product line. The figure inside appears to have been a reissue of the 2004 vintage-style figure from the *Original Trilogy Collection* product line. The figure was provided within a protective, plastic cover, bearing the Rebel Alliance and Galactic Empire symbols in the top corners and with a sticker on the bottom right of the protective cover that noted this as “free & exclusive at Woolworths.”



UK Woolworths exclusive Darth Vader figure with purchase of DVDs (2006)

UK buyers could also acquire a collector's tin version of the trilogy, similar to the American Best Buy option. Since only widescreen versions were available in the UK, there was no need for a notation of "widescreen" at the top, allowing the "limited edition" notation to take up the entire top bar on the front, and all packages bore gold bars without any blue versions. The tin itself was a tiny bit thicker (1.88 in.) than its U.S. counterpart (1.75 in.), and it only opened from the front whereas the Best Buy version could open from front or back. This release included a cardboard J-card which slid onto the tin from the bottom to "cup" the entire package.

One interesting difference between these UK DVDs and those that came previously was that it seems that there was finally recognition that Microsoft's Xbox console was not dominant in most regions of the world. For the first time since video game demos had begun appearing on *Star Wars* home video releases, the included demo (*LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*) was for PC, not Xbox, in the UK.



Meanwhile in Turkey (2006)

One of the biggest complaints leveled against the 2006 limited edition DVD releases for *The Original Trilogy*, at least from American buyers, was that, aside from the Best Buy exclusive collector's tin, there wasn't a boxed set of any kind available. (As we will soon see, that had to wait another two years.)

Turkey, however, *did* have a boxed set in 2006 for their version of these releases, but it was somewhat odd by American standards. All three films were packaged similarly to their releases from the United Kingdom. Since only widescreen copies were available, all cases used the gold color scheme, and the top, gold area noted it as a “limited edition” without also having to note that the film inside was widescreen. The Turkish packaging included a translated title and other Turkish text, while lacking the UK's ratings, but otherwise, the two were rather similar. What really set the Turkish releases apart from those in the U.S. or UK, though, was that they could be purchased together in a single boxed set that used a Turkish version of the slipcover that the U.S. (and regions like the UK) had seen for the “family pack” reissue of the 2004 releases in 2005.



The Original Trilogy (Turkish DVD, 2006)

It was an odd merging of products we tend to think of in the U.S. as from 2005 and 2006, yet it allowed Turkey to be one of the only regions in the world to have a standard boxed set, instead of just a collector's tin, for the 2006 limited edition DVDs.

Across the Galaxy *A New Hope* on DVD (2006)



A few 2006 ANH DVD releases from different regions –
Left to right: U.S.; UK; Australia; and Turkey

Meanwhile in Australia (2007)

In the U.S., we had seen DVD releases of the *Original Trilogy* films in 2004, 2005, and 2006. We would see another in 2008, but 2007 was a brief reprieve for American collectors: a year without another *Original Trilogy* DVD release. In that sense, though, it has been considered in retrospect to have been a missed opportunity. It was the 30th Anniversary of ANH premiering in theaters, but there were no new *Star Wars* film releases on the U.S. market to celebrate.

Australia, on the other hand, did not miss the opportunity.

In 2007, the Australian market had a release very similar to the American Best Buy exclusive collector's tin DVD set in 2006. However, since this was 2007, a milestone year for the saga, the Australian tin in 2007 was branded at the top with the label, "30th Anniversary." The tin was otherwise essentially identical to the UK version and an Australian version the previous year. The DVDs inside were simply the Australian versions of the 2006 releases. Like in the UK, the included *LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* demo was for PC.



The Original Trilogy (Australian DVD, 2007)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2007)

Speaking of interesting collector's tins for the *Original Trilogy*, the UK saw another in 2007 that harkened back to the look of the region's standard 2004 boxed set, recreating its look very closely. This was particularly appropriate, since the content of the tin was the 2004 boxed set (probably to get rid of old stock), not the updated 2006 releases. In other words, this was a way to get the bonus materials disc from 2004 (including *Empire of Dreams*, et al) in 2007, but one would miss out on the new bonus discs (including the "unaltered" films). It was certainly an unusual way to repackage an old product after it had already been superseded by newer releases.



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2007)

Meanwhile in Mexico (2008)

One year after the 30th Anniversary of ANH in theaters, which had prompted the Australian DVD collector's tin marked with the "30th Anniversary" label at the top, Mexico released its own version of a "30 Aniversario" DVD collector's tin, but it was somewhat odd when compared to recent tins in other regions.

This was a significantly larger tin (5.75 in. x 8 in. x 1.75 in. for the American tin vs. 7.13 in. x 9.5 in. x 1.94 in. for this Mexican version), designed to hold a formed plastic insert that held and protected an *Original Trilogy* DVD set that mirrored the American 2005 "family pack." This release, of course, included the Mexican version of that set, meaning Spanish disc labels, case artwork, and slipcover text, albeit with the English title underneath most instances of the films' Spanish titles. (No inserts were included.) Unlike the tins from other regions that used hinged covers (either front or both front and back), the cover of this Mexican tin simply lifted off. Information about the contents, which were often paper slips adhered to the back of releases in other regions that could later be removed to reveal artwork underneath, was actually printed onto the bottom of the Mexican tin.



The Original Trilogy (Mexican DVD, 2008) – Individual DVD cases fit into the “family pack” style slipcover (left), which was then placed into the formed plastic insert within the tin (right). The cover (center) was then placed on top of the tin to close this oversized package.



Cases and discs – Note that each disc label, case, and even the slipcover and tin itself included English titles beneath instances of the Spanish titles.

While this was a nice set, it unfortunately only included the 2004 cuts on DVD, rather than also including the “unaltered” versions on bonus discs,

and the release was a year late to celebrate the original film's 30th Anniversary.¹⁵⁹

Across the Galaxy *Original Trilogy* Collector's Tins (2006 – 2008)



A few 2006 – 2008 *Original Trilogy* DVD collector's tins from different regions – Left to right: U.S.; UK (with J-card); Australia; and Mexico

Full Screen, Be Gone! (2008)

The last hurrah for DVD as the lone format for live action *Star Wars* films in the United States came in 2008. After skipping a year (finally) by not reissuing the *Original Trilogy* again in 2007, two new boxed sets hit the American market with little fanfare in Nov. 2008.

Rather than releasing a full “saga” set of *Episodes I – VI*¹⁶⁰ or individual film releases, each trilogy was given its own new, widescreen DVD boxed set, the third of its kind for the *Original Trilogy* and a first for the *Prequel Trilogy*. Each set was “priced to own” at \$40¹⁶¹ and included each film’s

¹⁵⁹ It was close, though. ANH premiered in Mexican theaters in a very limited release on Nov. 23, 1977, followed by a broader release on Dec. 23, 1977, so calling this a 30th Anniversary release in 2008 was only really off by nine days for the Mexican market, if one goes by the broad release of the film.

¹⁶⁰ Release both of Lucas’ trilogies in one set? That’s crazy talk! Surely a “Saga Pack” should only ever include TPM and AOTC!

¹⁶¹ This would have been about \$48 per trilogy in 2020.

two-disc, widescreen DVD release (from 2001 for TPM, 2002 for AOTC, 2005 for ROTS¹⁶², and 2006 for ANH, TESB, and ROTJ). The films were put into slim cases for this release, which meant dropping the paper inserts of chapter and content listings found in their original releases, but otherwise, the only changes were to switch to slim cases and put them into a cardboard slipcover.

The slipcovers were designed to be a matching pair. The *Prequel Trilogy* set's slipcover was designed using the common, red-hued, "Mustafar duel with Vader's helmet looming in the background" design of many ROTS products (similar in this case to the duel/Vader pairing of the 2005 Best Buy lithograph folder). Starfighters now flanked either side of the duel in front of Vader, as droid tri-fighters chased ARC-170s on the left and Jedi Eta-2 interceptors flew on the right. The set was labeled *Star Wars Prequel Trilogy* with a gold logo in front of the lower half of the duel artwork, and the titles of each film with gold Roman numeral episode numbers behind them were listed below along a horizontal red banner. THX information (in gold text) took up the bottom of the cover art, below the title banner, against the case's black background. The top of the set labeled it as widescreen, which we will soon see was a bit odd.

While the *Original Trilogy* did not have existing artwork that quite matched the ROTS art upon which the *Prequel Trilogy* set's slipcover art was based, it could instead be based on the latter's slipcover, using existing elements. Thus, the *Episodes VI – VI* set replaced the classic ROTS "Anakin vs. Obi-Wan with orange Mustafar lava behind them" shot with Luke vs. Vader on Cloud City with white and blue, smoky lighting behind them. Vader's helmet again loomed over the scene. Ships flanked the duelists, with TIE fighters chasing an X-wing (a nice evolution of the tri-fighters chasing the ARC-170s) on the left and TIE fighters chasing the *Millennium Falcon* on the right. This set was labeled just *Star Wars Trilogy*, the classic name for these three films, despite there then being two different trilogies that could theoretically fit the name. Titles with Roman numerals matched the position of the *Prequel Trilogy* set, this time in front of a blue banner. THX information was in the same style as on the other set. The set's logo, Roman numerals, and THX information were in silver for this trilogy, rather than gold. This set was also labeled as widescreen at the top.

One might have expected that after FBI anti-piracy text and symbols were found on the ROTS DVD in 2005 and on *Original Trilogy* DVDs in

¹⁶² At least in Canada, some copies of this set had the same label error (the label for *The Story of Star Wars* on the ROTS bonus features disc) as some 2005 copies.

2006 that the new *Prequel Trilogy* set would have included updated disc labels to add such information to TPM and AOTC, which would have brought them in line with the other films, but that did not happen. Of the six films reissued between these two boxed sets, *Episodes I – II* did not bear FBI warnings on their labels, while *Episodes III – VI* did.¹⁶³



The Prequel Trilogy (DVD, 2008)



The Original Trilogy (DVD, 2008)

This release should also be noted for what *wasn't* available. For the first time since the initial DVD release of TPM in 2001, this widescreen DVD release had no corresponding full screen set available. (Yes, they were labeled widescreen when there were no corresponding full screen sets from which they needed differentiation.) In fact, while few guessed it at the time, the 2006 DVDs were the last full screen releases of any *Star Wars* films to

¹⁶³ This was just because old labels were reused, *not* because 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment recognized these as the two weakest of George Lucas' live action *Star Wars* films and thought no one would *want* to pirate them. Shame on you (okay, *me*) for considering such a thing!

date. 2008 was simply the final nail in full screen's coffin (or log on the funeral pyre, perhaps) for *Star Wars*.

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2008)

In the UK, fans could purchase a similar pair of trilogy DVD sets in 2008, along with a pair of exclusives that lacked any American equivalent. Moreover, even the standard releases from the UK were a bit different from their U.S. counterparts.

The two standard sets used artwork similar to the American trilogy sets, though being UK releases meant UK and Irish ratings on the front of the packaging, flanking the THX information. The back elements were also slightly shifted to accommodate UK rating information and other items, making the back sides of the UK releases not identical to the front sides as was the case in the U.S. The slim cases inside these standard packages were clear, akin to many of the UK DVD releases we've seen previously, and, of course, since full screen was not an option in the UK, there was no need for widescreen labeling on either the cases or the outer packaging.



The Prequel Trilogy (UK DVD, 2008)



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2008)

It was that outer packaging's design that was perhaps of most interest to American collectors. Whereas the American packaging had been slipcovers,

which featured one open side, through which the slim cases could be accessed, the UK packaging for these “boxed sets” were literal boxes, which required opening from the top or bottom to access the slim cases inside.



Package design comparison: UK box (left) vs. U.S. slipcover (right)

Meanwhile, UK retailer HMV released their own pair of trilogy sets with exclusive box artwork and a minor variation to the content. The discs and case art were identical to the standard releases, but the slim cases were black like the American version, rather than clear like the standard UK products. The boxes were still literal boxes, but they each focused on a single character: Anakin (from ROTS) with his lightsaber ignited against a black background for the *Prequel Trilogy* set and Luke (from ANH) with his blaster against a white background for the *Original Trilogy* set. Both used silver logos, matching the standard *Original Trilogy* set, rather than keeping with the gold color scheme for the *Prequel Trilogy*.



The Prequel Trilogy (UK DVD, 2008) – HMV exclusive



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2008) – HMV exclusive

The HMV exclusives were nice variations on the packaging and have become somewhat sought after over the years since their release, but while the Anakin artwork seemed well designed, the stark white of Luke's background on the *Original Trilogy* box, coupled with silver logos that used a gradient to nearly make them white in some spots, made that set's box appear washed out or bright to the point of losing detail.

Still, regardless of whether one considers the standard or HMV exclusive versions of this set, this was truly a “boxed set” in the UK, unlike in the U.S. where our “box” was really just a slipcover.

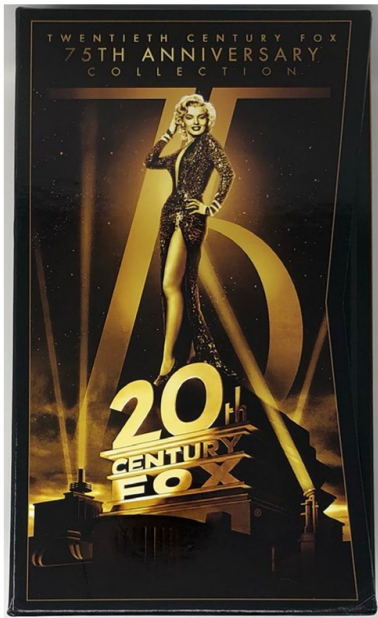
Look at the Size of That Thing! (2010)

One final, relatively obscure reissue of the 2004 DVD version of *A New Hope* existed in the U.S. It was included as the sole film to represent the year 1977 in the *20th Century Fox 75th Anniversary Collection*, an enormous boxed set of 75 films on DVD from throughout the storied film studio's existence, from 1933's *Cavalcade* (under 20th Century Pictures) through 2009's *Avatar*.

This stunning set, released on Dec. 7, 2010, unfortunately bore an equally stunning price tag of \$499.98 retail.¹⁶⁴

The entire set came in a large, black slipcase that featured Marilyn Monroe on the front against the 20th Century Fox logo and the large number “75,” Darth Vader on the back against a similar background, and the duo of Paul Newman and Robert Redford as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid on the spine.

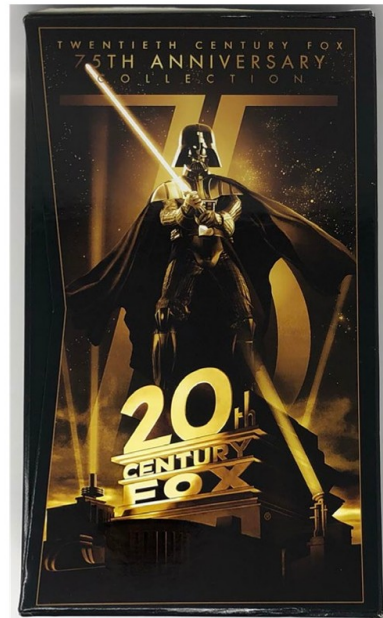
¹⁶⁴ That would've been about \$588 in 2020. Thankfully, these could be found far cheaper on the secondary market in the years to come.



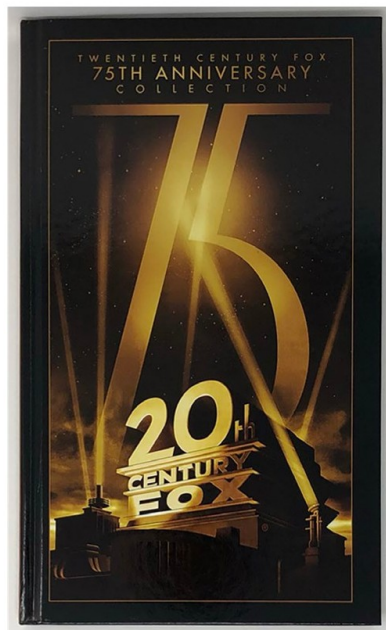
*20th Century Fox 75th
Anniversary Collection*
(DVD, 2010)



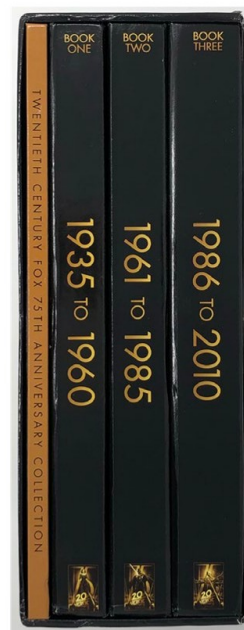
Slipcover (spine)



Slipcover (back)



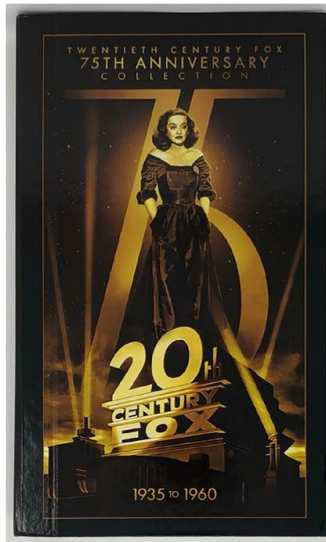
Hardback book



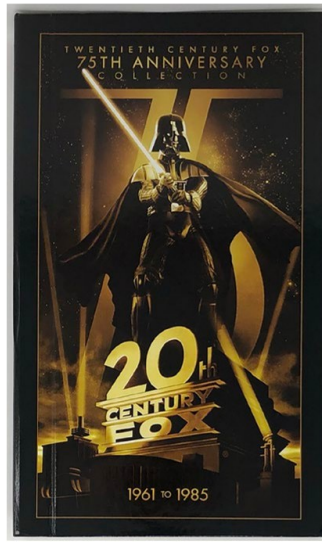
Album and book spines (in slipcover)

Inside the slipcase were three large albums that contained the DVDs for all of the films in the collection, divided into three eras: 1935 – 1960 (which actually included 1933, though that was two years prior to Fox Film Corporation and 20th Century Pictures merging into 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation, hence the date mismatch); 1961 – 1985 (in which ANH was contained); and 1986 – 2010 (though the last film was from 2009). The

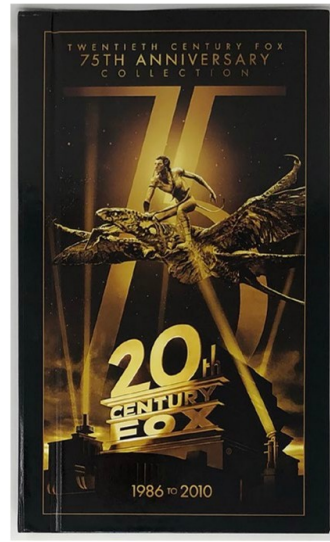
individual albums featured two covers not shown on the slipcase (from *All About Eve* and *Avatar*) and one that was on the slipcase (Darth Vader). Along with these albums was a nice hardback book that detailed the history of the company, plus information on why each film in the set was included. The book's cover used what was essentially the same artwork as the slipcover and albums without any characters, so that the "75" dominated the area above the 20th Century Fox logo.



1935 – 1960 album



1961 – 1985 album



1986 – 2010 album

The copy of *A New Hope* that was included probably *should* have been a DVD of the unaltered theatrical version of the film, given that this was a book about cinematic history, but the disc was simply a reissue (yet again) of the 2004 widescreen DVD, this time with a new label that matched the others in the set (except in the cases of films on double-sided, “flipper” DVDs that lacked full-size labels). The disc label was black with gold writing and logos, showing the 75th Anniversary 20th Century Fox logo, the standard company logo and legal information, plus the film's full title with both episode number and subtitle instead of simply *Star Wars*, the name it bore in the year it represented in this set.

As a whole, this set was a fascinating look into the development of American cinema and 20th Century Fox as a company.



ANH disc label



ANH disc in labeled 1977 album slot

Conclusion: An Era of Change

While not as extreme as changes wrought by 1997's *Special Editions*, the changes observed in the 2000 – 2008 era were perhaps even more profound for *Star Wars* home video collectors. In 2000, we saw a film hit home video after slightly less than a single year. In 2001, we saw the first *Star Wars* film reach DVD and begin a tradition of the films hitting DVD in altered form. In 2002, the wait for a home video release of a *Star Wars* film was reduced to a matter of mere months in the same calendar year, and the U.S. saw its last VHS release of a *Star Wars* film. In 2004, the *Original Trilogy* changed yet again. In 2006, we saw fan hopes answered and dashed simultaneously, while also witnessing the last time a *Star Wars* film would receive a full screen home video release in the U.S. In 2008, we saw the first *Prequel Trilogy* boxed set on any format.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile, a Second Format War was in motion, as HD-DVD and Blu-ray battled it out for high definition supremacy, leaving DVD's days seemingly numbered.

¹⁶⁵ To paraphrase Obi-Wan, “That business [with the 2002 *Saga DVD Pack* and *Saga Video Pack*] doesn’t – *doesn’t* – count!”

6 THE LUCAS FILMS IN HD

(2008 – 2015)

A Second Format War began in 2006, pitting Toshiba's HD-DVD format (launched Mar. 21) against Blu-ray (launched June 20), a format developed by Philips and Sony, the latter of whom had been a developer of multiple formats (e.g. U-matic, Beta, VCD, Video8) during the First Format War. By 2008, Sony had won this brief business battle, mostly through strategic alliances with movie studios and retailers, along with allowing its PlayStation 3 gaming console to act as a Blu-ray (and later Blu-ray 3D¹⁶⁶) player.¹⁶⁷

One is tempted to think that perhaps Lucasfilm was being a bit cagey by not releasing its live action *Star Wars* films in the midst of another multi-format era, waiting to see whether HD-DVD or Blu-ray would come out on top. The truth was probably less a matter of shrewdness and more an issue of once again being late to the party, as with the long wait for the *Original Trilogy* on DVD. The lack of *Star Wars* HD-DVD releases was likely just a matter of *Star Wars* not yet diving into HD on home video (though the films had appeared in HD on Cinemax in Nov. 2006 and then on basic

¹⁶⁶ Yes, I know it sounds strange to say “Blu-ray 3D” instead of calling it a “3D Blu-ray,” but the format is actually called “Blu-ray 3D.”

¹⁶⁷ Microsoft offered an HD-DVD player add-on for its Xbox 360 video game console starting in Nov. 2006, but it was discontinued in Feb. 2008 as it became clear that the format had lost this brief struggle for dominance to Blu-ray.

cable via Spike TV on Apr. 4, 2008)¹⁶⁸. By the time the saga received its first official home video release in high definition, HD-DVD was effectively dead.



Example: *Superman: The Movie* existed on both HD-DVD (left) and Blu-ray (right), since it was released during the midst of the Second Format War in 2006.

A *Star Wars* Film Hits Blu-ray (2008)

That first *Star Wars* Blu-ray release came in Nov. 2008 in the form of the animated film *The Clone Wars*, a sort of pilot movie (made of four combined episodes) for the television series of the same name. *The Clone Wars* will be addressed as a whole in a later chapter (*Rewriting the Clone Wars* in *Volume III*), but it is interesting to note that the first *Star Wars* Blu-ray was of an animated film, rather than any of the live action ones.¹⁶⁹ It is also

¹⁶⁸ Since these were pre-2011, the version being shown was the DVD cut (first released 2001 – 2005) of the films, using same 1080p sources that were used to produce those DVDs (which had been lower resolution than the scans, of course). Airings on Cinemax (and later HBO) presented the films in their full theatrical aspect ratio (letterboxed with black bars above and below for reasons addressed in this chapter). However, when aired on Spike TV (and later TNT), the films were shown in the 16:9 aspect ratio so that the image took up the entire screen of a widescreen television. The black bars were gone... but so was a small amount of the width of the picture, cut off to “zoom in” and fill the screen. Neither of these pre-Blu-ray, HD, television versions were made available on physical home media.

¹⁶⁹ The very first George Lucas (and Steven Spielberg) high definition release was *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* on Oct. 14, 2008, less than a month before *The Clone Wars* film’s own release.

noteworthy that 20th Century Fox had been a supporter of Blu-ray during the recent format war, strongly suggesting that if the live action films *had* gotten a release at the time, they would have been on Blu-ray. However, *The Clone Wars* was distributed through Warner Home Video, whose parent studio, Warner Bros., was one of the original supporters of HD-DVD. We may have missed a dual or even an HD-DVD exclusive release of *The Clone Wars* by a matter of months.¹⁷⁰

The Complete Saga... For Now (2011)

As we enter the era of *Star Wars* releases in HD, beginning with *The Clone Wars* in 2008 and continuing with Lucas' live action films in 2011, it is important to understand the presentation differences that high definition (HD) formats brought to the table and how they improved upon the standard definition (SD) formats that preceded them. The key to understanding this leap in visual quality is simple: more pixels tends to mean greater visual clarity.

Standard definition formats (DVD, VHS, LaserDisc, etc.) presented content in either an NTSC, PAL, or SECAM standard definition resolution, depending on region. NTSC sources provided 525 vertical lines of resolution with 480 of those lines visible. PAL and SECAM sources provided 625 vertical lines of resolution with 576 lines visible.¹⁷¹ The visual dimensions we would see with this 4:3 presentation were 720x480 for NTSC and 720x576 for PAL and SECAM. With the horizontal 720 the same in both cases, the vertical line measurement was the one that mattered in distinguishing them, so we tend to refer to them as 480i or 576i.

When referring to a resolution this way, the letter after the number will be either a lowercase *i* for *interlaced* or *p* for *progressive*. This refers to how lines of resolution are replaced or “refreshed” to present our eyes with motion. Interlaced signals present us with every other line of resolution changing at a time, tricking our eyes into perceiving motion and focusing on those that changed. This allows an interlaced signal to only use half the bandwidth of progressive scanning, which instead replaces the *entire* image each time the screen refreshes. In general, interlaced signals are more

¹⁷⁰ After already shifting to release on both HD-DVD and Blu-ray instead of just HD-DVD, Warner Bros. announced in Jan. 2008 that they would be dropping HD-DVD entirely as of June 2008, just two months before *The Clone Wars* premiered in theaters and five months before its home video release.

¹⁷¹ For more details, see the chapter *The Great Format War*.

efficient in terms of data, but they can result in some blurring and other visual defects that progressive scanning, while more data-heavy, is able to avoid.

High definition (HD) sources were exactly what the name implied: resolutions that were “larger” (i.e. containing more scan lines and therefore more pixels) than their SD counterparts. The lowest HD resolution to have been in common consumer usage was 720p (1280x720, progressive). However, “full” HD was either 1080i or 1080p (1920x1080, either interlaced or progressive). More horizontal and vertical lines meant more individual pixels, which meant a much clearer picture for the vast majority of HD materials. These new *Star Wars* releases were coming to us in 1080p: progressive instead of interlaced, featuring 2,073,600 pixels of glorious *Star Wars* imagery instead of the paltry 345,600 visible pixels of NTSC standard definition. In other words, the picture would be remarkably clearer, given that it now contained *six times* the number of pixels than even the best previous American releases. No wonder fans were excited in the extreme to finally see *Episodes I – VI* in HD!

Another noteworthy aspect of the move from DVD to Blu-ray was in how widescreen images were handled. As discussed previously, widescreen DVDs tended to be anamorphic widescreen, which stored “squished” images that were then converted back to “normal” images by the player. This helped make data storage more efficient. Blu-rays (and their later cousins, Blu-ray 3D and Ultra HD Blu-ray) typically did not use anamorphic widescreen. The increased storage capacity of the new discs allowed images to be stored without needing to be “squished.” Instead, films were typically stored as 16:9 aspect ratio frames, which meant that “theatrical” widescreen presentations that were narrower than (i.e. not as tall as) 16:9 would have black bars built into the frames above and below the video. Yes, letterboxing was back! It was just less annoying (in fact, rarely even commented upon) this time around, since viewers weren’t dealing with a transition of TV dimensions in this period as they had with the change from 4:3 to widescreen televisions in the late SD/early HD era.

One should also note that while region-locking still existed for Blu-rays, the process had changed. First, the switch to a standardized resolution (and players that could handle different frame rates) for high definition meant that the distinctions between NTSC, PAL, and SECAM were no longer issues for the vast majority of releases.¹⁷² Second, regions had been

¹⁷² Very rarely, a Blu-ray would be labeled as 50 Hz or 25 fps, which meant that it followed the old PAL standard and might not play on a player in countries that used NTSC. These Blu-rays were typically labeled as such on their packaging and

simplified. DVD had eight possible regions (1 – 8), along with an option to be region-free (AKA “all-region” or “Region 0”) but still NTSC, PAL, or SECAM. Blu-ray had just three regions (A – C), and many Blu-ray (and Blu-ray 3D) discs in later years were often labeled as “Region ABC,” which made them “region-free” (though some still refer to them as “all-region”), playable anywhere in the world. Thus, Blu-rays were much more easily imported from other regions (with the ability to actually play them) than standard definition media formats had been.

Finally, when considering Blu-ray, we should note the capacity of these discs when compared to the DVDs that preceded them. A typical movie was presented on a dual-layer DVD, also known as a DVD-9, which held about 8.5 GB. A single-layer Blu-ray could hold 25 GB, but most films were released on dual-layer Blu-rays that could hold 50 GB. Thus, the typical Blu-ray film disc could hold over 40 GB more content than a typical DVD film disc, though much of this capacity was used by the increased size of the HD films themselves.

With the same primary DVDs being issued for the *Original Trilogy* three times in five years (with varying bonus content) and the *Prequel Trilogy* DVDs being reissued in 2008, the same version of the films had been floating around for a while. Once again, anticipation was high for a release on the newest, “best” format. Three years after the last DVD-only release of *Episodes I – VI* (which was also, coincidentally, three years after the end of the HD format war *and* three years after *The Clone Wars* film made waves as the first *Star Wars* Blu-ray release), the live action films finally reached Blu-ray in a trio of boxed sets on Sept. 16, 2011. This time around, fans could buy either trilogy separately, or they could purchase all six films in one boxed set for the very first time. Those picking up *The Complete Saga*, as the package was called, were treated to a plethora of bonus features that were not available to those buying the trilogies separately. No individual releases were available.

For Blu-ray, the films were once again tinkered with by Lucas. The changes made for the 1997 *Special Editions* had been described as Lucas crafting his “definitive vision” of what the *Original Trilogy* was meant to be from the start. The 2004 alterations to *Episodes IV – VI* were more about fixing issues (either with the original films or 1997 versions) or providing stronger connections to the *Prequel Trilogy*. The 2011 tweaks to all six films ranged from minor corrections to the outright bizarre (see sidebar). Audio was provided with “lossless” 6.1 DTS-HD Master Audio, essentially adding

were *not* common.

another rear speaker to the previous 5.1 standard (through Dolby Digital Surround EX had already included a sixth channel for setups that could make use of it).

One should also note that these 1080p Blu-rays used the same 1080p scans of the *Original Trilogy* films (with more post-scan alterations) that had been created for the 2004 DVD releases, meaning that the color issues present on the DVDs were also present on the Blu-rays, albeit tweaked from time to time to correct major issues like the color of Luke's lightsaber in ANH.

Forever Tinkering:

Episodes I – VI on Blu-ray (2011)

The 2011 Blu-rays stand out in my mind as the moment when Lucas had to have been thinking, "I've tweaked them already, twice in some cases, but I just can't resist doing it again." In that context, I feel like *Jurassic Park*'s Ian Malcolm: "[George] was so preoccupied with whether or not [he] could [change the films again that he] didn't stop to think if [he] should."

Minor tweaks to fix earlier issues were nice to see, such as correcting the lightsaber color issues with the DVD version of ANH, hiding the stick holding the wampa's arm in TESB, and returning the wipe in ROTS (not so much an error to fix as an unnecessary change now unnecessarily reversed).

Other changes were superfluous but non-invasive, such as blinking Ewoks, more doodads sticking out of R2-D2 when shocked, and hearing Shmi during Anakin's nightmare on Naboo.

What always gets me are the changes that do not seem to have been thought out from the standpoint of internal film continuity. Why insert rocks to partially block R2-D2 while hiding from Tusken Raiders from one angle but not add the rocks to the opposite angle, thereby creating the "incredible vanishing rocks?" Why enlarge the gate to Jabba's palace from the outside without making the same update when viewed from inside?

Of course, this will forever be the set that is linked with two changes that bookend the saga. In TPM, the new CGI Yoda is, for me at least, a massive improvement upon the puppet used during filming. Then again, did we really need the end of the *Original Trilogy* to mirror the end of the *Prequel Trilogy* with a pair of new "No" declarations from Vader when dispatching Palpatine in ROTJ?

I have to be honest here: I have grown to be more accepting of the new ROTJ "no" pair than with Vader's cry of "no" at the end of ROTS, though neither ever drove me into fits of fan-rage.

For eight years, these tended to be the versions of the films that I would watch when I wanted to pop in one of Lucas' *Star Wars* films. I could

overlook the alterations made over the years in order to experience the sound and picture quality of Blu-ray. (The same is true today for the 4K cuts of the films from 2019.) If that makes me a “bad fan” in the eyes of some theatrical film purists, I won’t lose any sleep at night.

Regardless of the extent, rationale, or fan opinion of this new round of changes to the *Special Editions* (making them the *Even More Special Editions*?), their arrival on Blu-ray in *The Complete Saga*, a boxed set, made for a singularly impressive package for those hungry for the kind of bonus features that the expanded capacity of Blu-ray discs could provide. Each film was included on its own disc, complete with *two* audio commentaries (one of which was carried over from the DVDs, while the other was new and composed of a mixture of archival audio). Three more discs were included in the set, each containing a selection of thematic bonus features. Those bonus features were extensive.

Let’s start broadly here, then dive into details, since this buffet of bonus material can be a lot to digest, even in retrospect. Disc 7 (bonus disc 1, entitled *Episodes I – III Archives*) featured a plethora of *Prequel Trilogy* material, divided by film and then by planet. Disc 8 (bonus disc 2, *Episodes IV – VI Archives*) provided the same treatment to the *Original Trilogy*. Disc 9 (bonus disc 3, *Documentaries & Spoofs*) veered into somewhat unusual territory as a home for clips of *Star Wars* spoofs and several documentaries.

For TPM, its portion of Disc 7 was divided into Naboo, Tatooine, and Coruscant. Each included interviews (7 total), deleted/extended scenes (6 total), a concept art gallery (77 images total), and an area called *The Collection* that included still shots, details, 360° turnaround animations, and video “commentaries” (basically featurettes) for elements (e.g. maquettes, models, etc.) from the film (21 total). Interviews included videos that were specific to a topic or overviews that were about entire planets. As the first episode in the *Prequel Trilogy*, the bonus features menu for TPM also included an *Archive Fly-through* video, separate from any planet classification.

AOTC bonus content was divided similarly into Coruscant, Naboo, Tatooine, and Geonosis. In total, the section for *Episode II* included: 7 interviews; 5 deleted/extended scenes (none of which came from Tatooine); 78 pieces of concept art; and 22 items in *The Collection*.

ROTS bonus content was divided into Coruscant, Utapau, Mustafar, and section that somewhat broke convention by covering more than one planet, “Kashyyyk and Order 66.” In total, *Episode III* bonus content included: 6 interviews; 11 deleted scenes; 75 pieces of concept art; and 21 items in *The Collection*.

If we total up all of these categories, we find that Disc 7 included: 20 interviews; 22 deleted/extended scenes; 230 pieces of concept art; 64 items

in *The Collection*; and 1 *Archive Fly-through*.

Disc 8, the *Episodes IV – VI Archives*, similarly addressed each film separately and then subdivided the films' content. However, those subdivisions were not always under a planet name but sometimes a phrase to indicate a portion of the film.

ANH bonus content was divided into Tatooine, "Aboard the Death Star," and "The Battle of Yavin." In total, *Episode IV* bonus content included: 6 interviews; 8 deleted scenes; 70 pieces of concept art; and 21 items in *The Collection*. As the first episode in the *Original Trilogy*, the bonus features menu for ANH also included an *Archive Fly-through* video, separate from any planet classification.

TESB bonus content was divided into Hoth, Dagobah, "Pursued by the Imperial Fleet," and Cloud City. In total, *Episode V* bonus content included: 7 interviews; 10 deleted scenes; 90 pieces of concept art; and 29 items in *The Collection*.

ROTJ bonus content was divided into Tatooine, Endor, and "Death Star II Space Battle." In total, *Episode VI* bonus content included: 4 interviews; 5 deleted scenes; 75 pieces of concept art; and 25 items in *The Collection*.

If we total up all of these categories, we find that Disc 7 included: 17 interviews; 23 deleted/extended scenes; 235 pieces of concept art; 75 items in *The Collection*; and 1 *Archive Fly-through*.

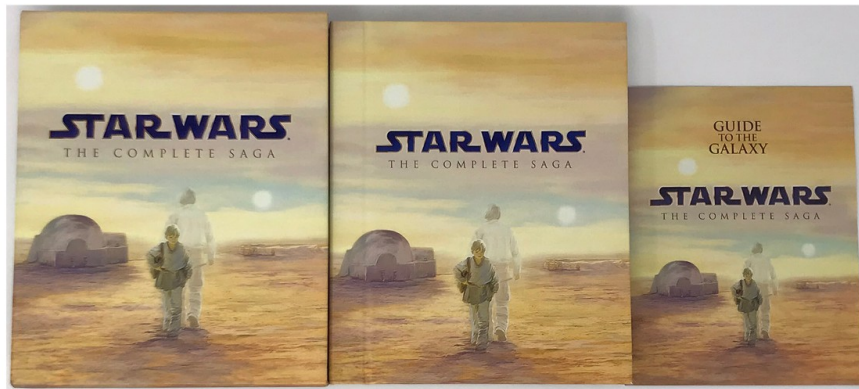
The oddball third bonus disc (disc 9) included seven documentaries: *The Making of Star Wars as Told by C-3PO and R2-D2* (in its 1977, William Conrad form); *SP FX: The Empire Strikes Back*; *Classic Creatures: Return of the Jedi*; the History Channel's *Star Wars Tech* (previously released on DVD as a *StarWarsShop.com* exclusive); the official *Star Wars* website's *Anatomy of a Dewback*; *Star Warriors* (a 2007 documentary on the 501st Legion and that year's Rose Parade); and the new *A Conversation with the Masters: The Empire Strikes Back 30 Years Later*.¹⁷³

A separate section on disc 9, called *Star Wars Spoofs*, was a single, 97-minute video compilation of segments (often full skits) from various *Star Wars* spoofs, both professional and amateur, including segments or full content from: Weird Al Yankovic's "The Saga Begins" music video; *Saturday Night Live*; *Robot Chicken*; *How I Met Your Mother*; *That '70s Show*; *The Simpsons*; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; *The Daily Show*; *Hot Shots! Part Deux*; *Yoda's Tom Tom VO Session*; *The Colbert Report*; the MTV Movie Awards; *30 Rock*;

¹⁷³ More information on the first four of these documentaries can be found in the chapter *Behind the Curtain* in *Volume III*.

French & Saunders; The Muppet Show; Just Shoot Me; Star Wars According to a 3 Year Old; Late Night with Conan O'Brien; Chad Vader; Simon Pegg and Nick Frost's Star Wars; Troops; Clerks; Family Guy; Spaceballs; Fanboys; Auston Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me; Eddie Izzard: Circle; Death Star Cantina; AT-AT Day Afternoon; Toy Story 2; Darth Vader Feels Blue; Hip Hop Yoda (the Yoda dancing Easter egg from the 2005 ROTS DVD release); *Star Wars Gangsta Rap: Special Edition; Donny and Marie; Futurama; According to Jim; Fast LEGO Star Wars Summary; Candid Camera; Darth Vader Being a Jerk; Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian; Darth Vader's Tom Tom VO Session*; and commercials for Spike TV, Volkswagen, and Target.

If we total up all of these discs, we find that *The Complete Saga* included: 12 commentaries; 37 interviews; 45 deleted/extended scenes; 465 pieces of concept art; 139 items in *The Collection*; 2 *Archive Fly-through* videos; and 8 documentaries (counting *Star Wars Spoofs*). This was an avalanche of awesome for those seeking bonus material on the saga, and most of what was included (production art, character models, interviews, deleted scenes, etc.) had not been released previously, either at all, or at least since the move to DVD. The package even included a hidden bonus feature (on Disc 8) in the form of *The Story of the Faithful Wookiee*¹⁷⁴, the Nelvana Ltd. animated tale from 1978's *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, making it the only full segment of the program ever officially released on home video.

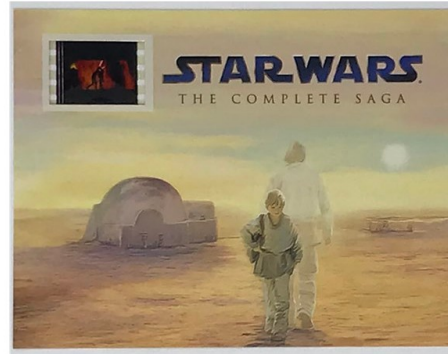


The Complete Saga (Blu-ray, 2011)

¹⁷⁴ To view *The Story of the Faithful Wookiee*, navigate to *V* (TESB), then *Pursued by the Imperial Fleet*. Select *The Collection* and then the entry for the *Boba Fett Prototype Costume*. Once within that entry, select *First Look* from the menu. After several seconds, the cartoon will begin playing.



Example of interior page: TPM



Best Buy Senitype preorder bonus

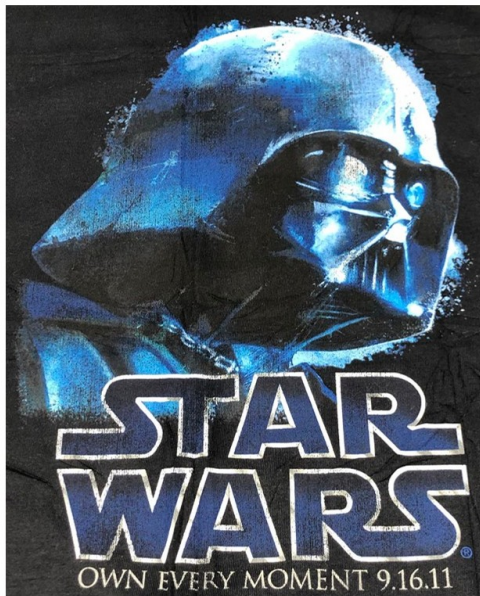
Packaging for *The Complete Saga*'s 2011 release was a side-loading cardboard “book” (known as a digibook) with individual pages holding the discs inside slits in the page. This packaging style has been described by fans as both fancy and damaging to discs, though I know of very few confirmed accounts of actual disc damage due to how discs entered and left such pages.

The slipcover's artwork featured the Lars moisture farm on Tatooine with young Anakin (who was never there as a child) walking toward the viewer (similar to the TPM version A theatrical poster by Ellen Lee and Jim Ward), while ANH era Luke faces the opposite direction almost like a ghost behind him, walking away from the viewer. Interior pages were thick, cardboard, two-page spreads with artwork going across both pages and the name of the disc (or film) and disc slot on the right-hand page. Art for each of the six films were (in order): Maul on Tatooine; Anakin and Padmé on Naboo; Sith-eyed, pre-cyborg Darth Vader on Mustafar to the left with the “cable swing” moment from the Mustafar duel to the right; the “Big Three” (Luke, Leia, and Han) in the Death Star corridor; Yoda on Dagobah as Luke and R2-D2 approach from near Luke's parked X-wing; and the final duel of ROTJ (showing Luke vs. Vader in front of Palpatine). Bonus disc pages featured art of Boba Fett riding a varactyl, Han emerging in surrender from behind Ewoks, and C-3PO, R2-D2, and a mounted rider encountering a large droid in a desert. A final two-page spread held the insert (labeled as the *Guide to the Galaxy*) and used a large image of many, many of the film characters together, including some characters next to themselves (e.g. ANH Obi-wan next to ROTS Obi-Wan and ROTS Anakin next to TPM Anakin).

The *Guide to the Galaxy* insert used the same cover art as the slipcover. Again, we might consider the insert booklet as a series of two-page spreads. The first two pages provided information about the content of the first bonus disc with concept art of the Mustafar duel on the right hand page at the top. The next two pages use a similar approach to cover the second bonus disc with art of Luke on his tauntaun on Hoth in the same upper

right location. The middle two-page spread (where we saw the inner portion of the staples) showed a combined image of the artwork from both of the inserts from the individual trilogy sets (or the San Diego Comic-Con lithograph we will encounter in a moment). Another spread dedicated to bonus disc content followed, detailing the final disc of bonus content with the oft-used “*Millennium Falcon* followed by X-wings inside the second Death Star” shot. A final two-page spread then provided cast and crew information for each film.

Those looking for an even more “complete” package from 2011 could hunt down various retailer exclusive bonuses. Best Buy offered customers who preordered the set a recreated film cell (known as a “Senitype”) in a small card (5.5 in. x 4.5 in.) with art that matched *The Complete Saga* packaging. The Senitype image was from the iconic grappling moment in the ROTS Mustafar duel. Those ordering through Best Buy’s website had the added bonus of receiving a tee-shirt featuring Vader’s face from the *Original Trilogy* Blu-ray set (which we will examine in a moment), a slogan (“Own every moment”), and the release date (“9.16.11”). Shirts were also available in stores for purchase separately post-release.



Best Buy exclusive tee-shirt design



Best Buy exclusive tee-shirt (unopened)

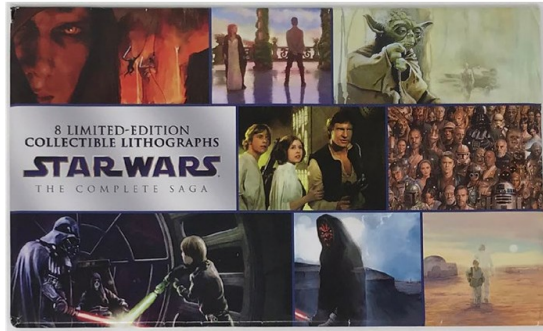
Fans who preordered the set at San Diego Comic-Con (July 21 – 24, 2011) were offered a special lithograph (made of the artwork from the individual trilogy sets’ inserts from this year, which we will see below, combined into a single image) in a 10 in. x 8 in. cardboard frame. These were individually numbered by hand and limited to only 1,138 lithographs.

Target, meanwhile, offered those who purchased (rather than preordered) the set an envelope that included eight cardstock lithographs

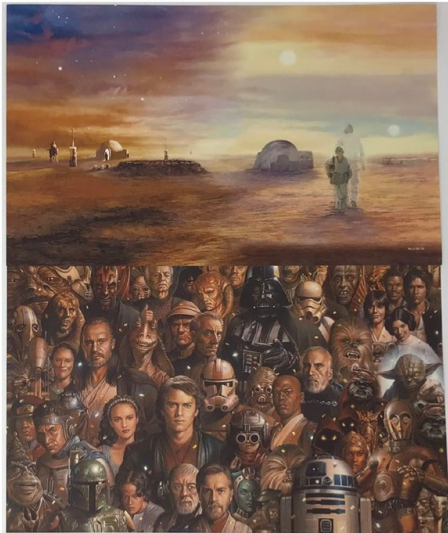
(approx. 10.5 in. x 6.5 in.) that featured the artwork from set's slipcover and various pages within the packaging. Artwork included images from all six films' pages in the digibook, its cover, and the page that held the *Guide to the Galaxy* booklet. (None of the artwork from the bonus disc pages made the cut for this package.)



San Diego Comic-Con exclusive lithograph



Target exclusive lithograph envelope



Target lithographs:
exterior/interior package artwork



Prequel Trilogy
package artwork



Original Trilogy
package artwork



The Prequel Trilogy (Blu-ray, 2011)



The Original Trilogy (Blu-ray, 2011)

Those not interested in spending \$140 (or more like \$90 through most online retailers) for *The Complete Saga* could buy each trilogy individually for \$70 (or about \$35 – \$45 online) but at the cost of bonus material.¹⁷⁵ Neither trilogy set included that trilogy's bonus disc (7 or 8) from *The Complete Saga*, making the two audio commentaries per film the only bonus features included. This was perceived in some circles as a slight toward those who preferred one trilogy over another, but it was in keeping with Lucas' own

¹⁷⁵ In 2020 dollars, that would be an MSRP of \$160 for *The Complete Saga* and \$80 for each trilogy. Online retail prices mentioned would convert to \$103 for *The Complete Saga* or \$40 – 51 per trilogy once adjusted for inflation.

view that the films were a single saga divided into six episodes.¹⁷⁶

The trilogy sets were in more typical packaging, held together in a standard Blu-ray case with a cardboard, side-loading slipcover, featuring either Yoda (*Prequel Trilogy*) or Vader (*Original Trilogy*) with other characters scattered about in the area around the featured character's neck. Disc labels for all three sets were quite plain. Film disc labels included that episode's logo (a blue *Star Wars* logo with a Roman numeral episode number behind it and title below it), along with a thick blue stripe with the Blu-ray logo below. Bonus discs in *The Complete Saga* were similar, though without Roman numerals to go with the disc titles.



Top row: *Prequel Trilogy* Blu-ray disc labels

Middle row: *Original Trilogy* Blu-ray disc labels

Bottom row: *The Complete Saga* Blu-ray bonus features disc labels

¹⁷⁶ Or one, or twelve starting with ANH, or nine with ANH as number four, or whatever the current party line was at the time. In 2011, it was that there had only *ever* been six live action films planned, which we knew even then was a bunch of bovine secretions (i.e. “b.s.”).

Inserts within the trilogy sets featured the *Star Wars* logo and individual “title and Roman numeral” logos for each film beneath, similar to the cases, set against artwork of either Anakin in the cockpit of his Eta-2 Actis Jedi Interceptor (*The Prequel Trilogy*) or Luke in the cockpit of his X-wing (*The Original Trilogy*).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2011)

In the United Kingdom, all three boxed sets were available as well. However, unlike in the U.S., Senitype bonuses were available for all three products, not just *The Complete Saga*.



UK Senitypes (on cards) for *The Complete Saga* (top), *The Prequel Trilogy* (bottom left), and *The Original Trilogy* (bottom right)



The Complete Saga
Senitype



The Prequel Trilogy
Senitype



The Original Trilogy
Senitype

The Senitype for *The Complete Saga* (and the card it was held within) was identical to the American version. Each trilogy's Senitype was held on a card that used the same logos and main character image (Yoda or Vader), cropped to only show that single character. The *Prequel Trilogy* Senitype

showed Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Anakin with R2-D2 as the droid projected a hologram on Naboo. The *Original Trilogy* Senitype showed the heroes looking out into space toward the departing *Millennium Falcon* at the end of TESB.

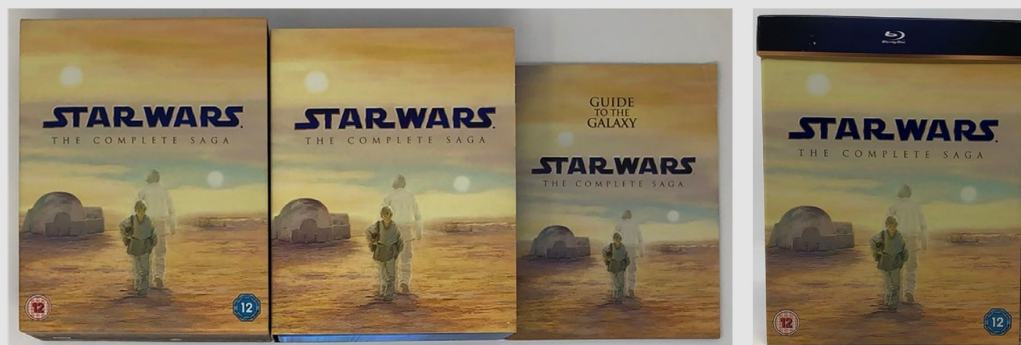
The differences didn't stop there. Disc labels were far more elaborate in the UK.¹⁷⁷ Each label featured a single character. *Episodes I – VI* disc labels featured (in order): Yoda; Dooku; Palpatine; Obi-Wan; Chewbacca; and Darth Vader. (The art of Yoda and Vader were taken from the same artwork as the individual trilogy Blu-ray sets.) The three bonus discs featured C-3PO (disc 7); Lando (disc 8); and R2-D2 (disc 9). While the characters chosen might seem a bit odd (i.e. no Luke, Leia, Han, or Anakin, except as Vader), this was certainly a more engaging form of label art when compared to the cleaner but more sterile feeling of the American disc labels.



Disc labels

¹⁷⁷ Of course, being “far more elaborate” than the American labels didn’t take much...

While the UK received all three sets, standard UK packaging for *The Complete Saga* held discs differently than the American digibook, making concern about damaged discs a non-issue. This release came in both standard and limited edition (i.e. including the Senitype) forms. It was a taller and thicker set that again used a slipcover over interior, disc-holding packaging, with a small booklet as a guide to content. The package was sold with a J-card attached that kept the Blu-ray symbol from being built into the slipcover artwork, but ratings for the UK and Ireland were built into the bottom of the cover art.



The Complete Saga (UK Blu-ray, 2011)

With J-card

The key difference for this release was the interior portion that actually held the discs. Instead of a cardboard digibook, this was an album of blue, plastic pages that held each disc in a more standard fashion.



Opened to first page (without discs)



Plastic pages (one disc each)

This kept the disc label art on display, while eliminating the page art for each disc that made the digibook design so appealing to those unconcerned about disc scratching. This was a more functional set that, frankly, I am somewhat surprised did not get imported into the U.S. more often, given the frequent (probably overblown) complaints of disc scratching (or fears thereof) in relation to the digibook version.

A minor variant of this year's UK *Original Trilogy* Blu-ray set also

illustrates an interesting trend seen in other regions but far less in the United States: home video items packed in with players, similar to how many video game consoles came packaged with games. In 2011, copies of *The Original Trilogy* on Blu-ray were included (without their slipcovers) in Blu-ray players from Panasonic. These copies were marked as “not for individual sale” in the spot on the back where their UPC would usually be located. These copies also included a slip featuring Darth Vader artwork and a coupon for 5 pounds off of purchase of *The Prequel Trilogy* at retailer HMV.



The Original Trilogy (UK Blu-ray, 2011) – Panasonic player pack-in variant

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video *The Complete Saga* on Blu-ray (2011)

The release of *Episodes I – VI* on Blu-ray was another product launch that was considered not just a major event for *Star Wars* as a franchise but for the Blu-ray format as a whole. As such, Hasbro released another series of commemorative action figure packs to celebrate the occasion. This time, though, there were six films to celebrate, resulting in six packs, rather than the usual two or three. Moreover, each pack would include four action figures, rather than the typical three, and packs would be widely available, instead of retailer exclusives. These six packs were part of the *Shadow of the Dark Side* product line.

This time around, the products included both figures and a mini-poster for each film. As such, they were billed as the *Blu-ray Release Commemorative*

Figure & Mini-Poster Collections (quite a mouthful). The pack for TPM included Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn, Darth Maul, and a B1 battledroid. The AOTC pack included Anakin Skywalker, Count Dooku, Jango Fett, and a clone trooper. The ROTS pack included Mace Windu, General Grievous, Yoda, and Clone Commander Bly. The ANH pack included Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, a sandtrooper, and R2-D2 (without C-3PO this time). The pack for TESB included Leia Organa, Luke Skywalker, Boba Fett, and a snowtrooper. Finally, the pack for ROTJ included Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, and a biker scout (AKA scout trooper).

None of the figures were entirely new, though there were some minor tweaks. Sixteen were just repackaged from previous releases in 2005 (Maul, clone trooper, and Anakin), 2007 (Mace), 2008 (Jango), 2009 (B1 battledroid, TPM Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon, TESB Luke, and biker scout), 2010 (Dooku, Grievous, snowtrooper, Leia, and Boba), and 2011 (Yoda). The other eight were minor repaints from 2005 (R2-D2), 2006 (sandtrooper), 2007 (Bly), 2008 (Vader and Han), 2009 (ANH Luke and ANH Obi-Wan), and 2010 (ROTJ Luke). One figure was a previous retailer exclusive now made available widely: Dooku, who had been part of a Target exclusive pack in 2010.



Blu-ray Release Commemorative Figure & Mini-Poster Collection packs for TPM, AOTC, and ROTS (2011)



Blu-ray Release Commemorative Figure & Mini-Poster Collection packs for ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (2011)

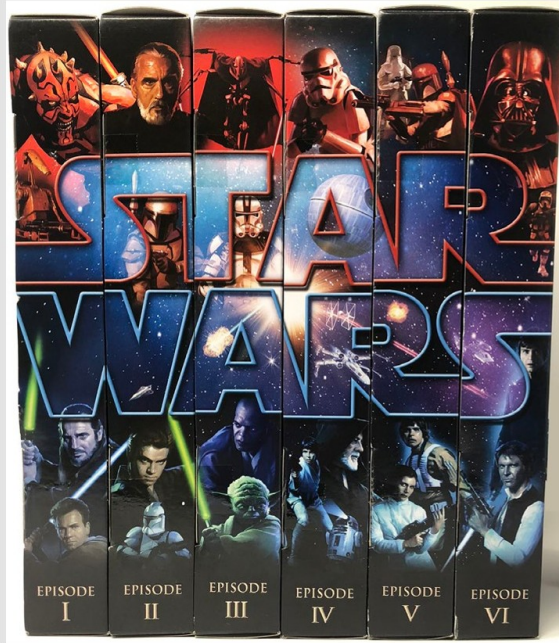
Posters were found behind the figures in each pack and recreated original theatrical posters, including the cast/crew information on those posters. Art used for this line included: the Drew Struzan version B posters for all three prequels; Tom Jung's style A poster for ANH; Roger Kastel's style A poster for TESB; and Kazuhiko Sano's style B poster for ROTJ.

Each package bore the *Star Wars* logo running along its left side, while its right side curved away, similar to the packaging of the smaller packs in previous years. The side that did not curve away featured a spine with one part of a six-part image that was formed when all six packs were placed side-by-side like books on a shelf.

The six-part image included a *Star Wars* logo in the middle, stretching across all six boxes and presented as a sort of outline (*Star* in red, *Wars* in blue) with an image within that seemed (to me at least) to be Rebel starfighters escaping the destruction for the first Death Star. Above the logo, villains appeared in red, including (from left to right, box to box): Maul with a B1 battledroid; Dooku with Jango Fett; Grievous with a clone trooper (from post-Order 66, presumably, so he could be a villain to fit the theme); a stormtrooper (alone); Boba Fett with a snowtrooper; and Vader with a biker scout (AKA scout trooper). Below the logo, heroes dominated, including (again, left to right, box to box): Qui-Gon with Obi-Wan; Anakin with a clone trooper (Phase I); Mace Windu with Yoda; Obi-Wan with Luke and R2-D2; Luke with Leia; and Luke with Han. (Yes, that means Luke appeared on all three *Original Trilogy* boxes.) Below the heroes, each film's episode number was listed (as "Episode" with the Roman numeral below it) without their actual titles.

Of course, the standard warning from previous releases was updated for

this line of figure packs: “Blu-ray Discs not included.”



Full spine artwork

One year later, another round of five tie-in action figures was released. These 2012 items differed significantly from their predecessors in that they were based on a home video release (*The Complete Saga* Blu-ray set) in a different year than when that item actually premiered (2012 instead of 2011). These tie-ins were also not multi-figure packs but instead simply single action figures, released individually. Each of the five action figures was based on a deleted scene from *The Complete Saga*. (Oddly, all five were from deleted scenes for ROTJ. In fact, two of the five were based on the *same* deleted scene.)

The *Blu-ray Deleted Scene Figures* in this wave of *The Vintage Collection* included: a Mon Calamari (or Mon Cala in modern canonical parlance) Rebel pilot from the Battle of Endor; Colonel Airen Cracken (as a member of the *Millennium Falcon*'s crew during the Battle of Endor); Luke Skywalker from the scene in which he constructs his green lightsaber; and versions of Leia Organa and Lando Calrissian that were based on the Tatooine sandstorm scene.

Unlike most of the other figures we have seen (or will see in *Volume III*), these were almost all either entirely new figures or “kit-bashed” figures that used parts from multiple figures (or some old parts with new parts) to create a “new-ish” figure. The Rebel pilot was a kit-bash of new parts, along with pieces of 2008's Keyan Farlander and 2010's Admiral Ackbar. Cracken was new except for the legs and feet of a 2006 Rebel trooper figure. Luke

was almost entirely new with just some limb pieces reused from a 2010 Luke. Lando was entirely new. Leia (as one might have expected, given that this was basically Leia in her slave garb with outerwear) was a repainted slave Leia figure from 2011 with new accessories.



Rebel Pilot
(Mon Calamari)



Colonel Cracken
(*Millennium Falcon* Crew)



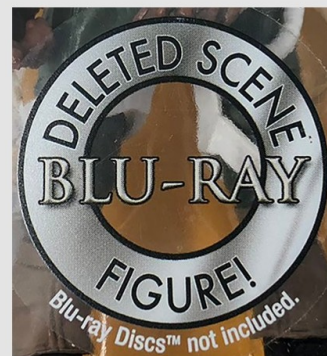
Luke Skywalker
(Lightsaber
Construction)



Lando Calrissian
(Sandstorm Outfit)



Princess Leia
(Sandstorm Outfit)



Blu-ray Deleted Scene
Figure sticker

Each figure was on a simple card with the “bubble” holding the figure bearing a sticker that stated that this was a *Blu-ray Deleted Scene Figure* and that, of course, “Blu-ray Discs not included.”

For those keeping count, the release of this line of figures in 2012 brought the total of home video tie-in action figure products to 26.¹⁷⁸

Spectacles for the Spectacle (2012)

The Phantom Menace

On Feb. 10, 2012, *The Phantom Menace* returned to theaters. This was the first in what was planned to be a re-release of all six of Lucas' live action films on the big screen in 3D. The film had been remastered and then underwent a 3D conversion to make TPM the very first *Star Wars* film to appear in theaters in this form. Unfortunately, lackluster performance and the sale of Lucasfilm to Walt Disney Company shortly thereafter made this the only one of the *Prequel* or *Original Trilogy* films to be released theatrical in 3D.

We will delve more into 3D viewing in the chapter *Enter: Disney* in *Volume II* when we see *The Force Awakens* become the first *Star Wars* film released on Blu-ray 3D for home viewing. However, this theatrical release of TPM provided three customized pairs of RealD 3D glasses that could be used for home viewing when using a RealD, passive 3D setup.

The most well-known pair of TPM RealD 3D glasses was labeled a "collectible keepsake" item on its packaging. The frames were red, while the temples (AKA arms) were black. The film's logo and Darth Maul's eyes appeared on the right temple, while the RealD 3D logo appeared on the left temple. These were available at movie theaters.

¹⁷⁸ We will see the "missing" six not yet covered in the chapters *Genndy Goes Micro* and *Rewriting the Clone Wars*, both in *Volume III*.



TPM RealD 3D glasses (2012) – theatrical version



Right temple

A second pair was available at retail from a company called Look3D. Typically, for *Star Wars* RealD 3D glasses, those found in theaters in America would typically be through standard RealD distribution or, in the Disney era, CDM Company, while Look3D would also provide specialized glasses in more limited (or in this case retail) distribution. For TPM, the Look3D glasses were based on Anakin Skywalker's goggles when podracing. These included a cloth bag for both storing and cleaning the glasses and came on a card similar to that of an action figure. The frames were black with gray rings around the lenses, while the temples were yellow. One temple included the film's name, while the other bore a logo that read "podracing."



Look3D Anakin Skywalker Podracer 3D Glasses (2012) – retail product



Glasses and cloth bag



Left temple



Right temple

Later the same year, *Star Wars* Celebration VI (Aug. 23 – 26, 2012) was held in Orlando, FL. This convention included three sessions on Aug. 25 at which Dennis Muren and John Knoll discussed the process of converting the *Star Wars* films into 3D and provided a preview of AOTC, along with a separate screening on Aug. 23 of TPM in 3D at the convention, sponsored by RealD 3D. For both events, another pair of 3D glasses was provided. These were also labeled as a “collectible keepsake” and were similar in design to the theatrical Darth Maul pair. Frames were green, while the temples were again black. The convention logo was found on the right temple, while the RealD 3D logo adorned the left temple again.



TPM RealD 3D glasses (2012) – *Star Wars* Celebration VI version



Right temple

This trio of RealD 3D glasses were the first of at least 22 to be released for the saga between 2012 and 2018.

The Mouse Cometh (2012)

In Oct. 2012, it was announced that Walt Disney Company was purchasing Lucasfilm. Once the sale was finalized two months later, the future of the franchise was in the hands of the House of Mouse. However, the impact of this sale on *Star Wars* home video products was minimal at first. We will go into more detail on the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney and the broader implications thereof as we kick off *Volume II* in our next chapter, *Enter: Disney*. For now, it is important simply to know that while Lucasfilm was now owned by Disney, the distribution rights to *Episodes I – VI* were all tied up in existing deals that Disney, as Lucasfilm's new owner, was obligated to honor.

Distribution rights (in all forms) for ANH were held by 20th Century Fox in perpetuity, while physical distribution rights for the other five of Lucas' live action films were held by 20th Century Fox until 2020. This kept physical releases with 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment and had interesting implications for future digital releases, as we will see soon.

Spectacles for the Spectacle (2013)

Attack of the Clones

The second *Star Wars* Celebration to be held in Europe took place July 26 – 28, 2013, in Essen, Germany. By then, 3D releases of Lucas' other five live action films had been announced as postponed on Jan. 28, 2013. However, the 3D conversion process had been completed for *Attack of the Clones* (and either had been or would soon be for *Revenge of the Sith*). Rather than letting this new version of AOTC go to waste, the film was shown to fans at the convention not just once but with opportunities to see the film on all three days of the convention.

Once again, special 3D glasses were provided, this time mostly resembling those of the TPM screening at the previous year's Celebration in Florida. Frames were green again (though a slightly different shade) with black temples. The convention logo was found on the right temple, while the RealD 3D logo adorned the left temple again.



AOTC RealD 3D glasses (2013) – *Star Wars* Celebration Europe II



Right temple

C-C-C-Combo Pack!¹⁷⁹ (2013)

The saga returned to Blu-ray two years after its debut on the format on Oct. 8, 2013. This release eschewed a set of all six episodes in favor of two new trilogy sets. While this meant the loss of Discs 7 – 9 of *The Complete Saga* with all of their fantastic extras, it did provide an opportunity for the films to be released in their first Blu-ray/DVD combo packs.¹⁸⁰ Each trilogy’s boxed set featured six discs in a standard Blu-ray case with new Yoda (against a white background) or Vader (against a black background) imagery on both the inner case and a slipcover. Of those discs, three were simply reissues of the Blu-ray film discs from 2011. The other three, however, were DVD copies of the same 2011 version of the films, making 2013 the year in which the “Blu-ray cuts” (or, as I prefer to call them, the *Even More Special Editions*) saw release outside of Blu-ray and supplanted the 2004 version of the films as the most recent version (as of 2013) released not just on Blu-ray but also on DVD.

Disc labels for the Blu-rays were identical to their 2011 release, while labels for the DVDs used similar film logos (themed in silver/gray, rather than blue/gray like the Blu-rays) on a plain black background with the relevant iconography and legalese. No colored bar (like the bar with the “Blu-ray Disc” logo) was present.

Inserts were updated from the 2011 packages to present the *Star Wars* logo and film logos at the bottom with an image above of a either Naboo or the Death Star, ringed (except on the bottom) by characters from that trilogy, and two shots of starfighters. For the *Prequel Trilogy*, the characters around Naboo included (clockwise from the left end): Padmé; Anakin; Palpatine (somewhat in shadow looming over the others); Obi-Wan; and Yoda. The starfighter groups were a mixture of N-1 starfighter, droid starfighter, and Jedi interceptors on the left, and just Jedi interceptors on the right. For the *Original Trilogy* insert, characters around the Death Star included (clockwise from the left end again): Obi-Wan; Leia; Vader (looming over the others); Luke; and Han. The two starfighter groups were a mixture of X-wings and TIE Advanced x1 starfighters (two for some reason) on the left, then just X-wings on the right. The art on these inserts

¹⁷⁹ Yes, I’m an old *and* new (less old?) school *Killer Instinct* fan.

¹⁸⁰ These were not the first Blu-ray/DVD combo packs for *Star Wars*, just for the films. *LEGO Star Wars: The Padawan Menace* beat the live action films by two years, as we will see in the chapter *Brick by Brick* in *Volume III*.

always amuses me, as they bring to mind an early moment in the official music video for Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody."

Unfortunately, these combo packs tended to get lost in the shuffle back then, as several other *Star Wars* home video releases (most notably of *The Clone Wars*) were all released in the span of about two weeks with significantly greater fanfare (i.e. any at all).¹⁸¹



Disc label comparison: Blu-ray (left) vs. DVD (right)



The Prequel Trilogy (Blu-ray, DVD, 2013)

¹⁸¹ See the chapter *Rewriting the Clone Wars* in *Volume III* for more about what I call the "Great Home Video Blitz of Oct. 2013."



The Original Trilogy (Blu-ray, DVD, 2013)

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2013)

In the United Kingdom, Blu-ray and DVD combo packs were not available in 2013. (Those have never been common for *Star Wars* releases in the UK.) However, the UK did see two other pairs of items that America did not.

In the UK, DVD-only *Prequel* and *Original Trilogy* sets were available, featuring the 2011 cuts. Each trilogy was contained in a clear DVD case with cover art and inserts similar to the U.S. combo packs. Contrary to how these are often found on the secondary market today, the original releases of these sets in 2013 *did* include slipcovers with matching cover art to their interior cases. Disc labels were essentially the same as the DVD labels from the U.S. in the same year (i.e. black with titles and iconography for the region), rather than the fancier, character-focused art of their UK Blu-ray siblings.

The American market would not see these cuts available on DVD without an accompanying Blu-ray until the relabeled, individual reissues of the 2013 DVDs in 2019, and we would never see the 2011 cuts in DVD-only trilogy sets at all.



The Prequel Trilogy (UK DVD, 2013)



The Original Trilogy (UK DVD, 2013)

Meanwhile, with SteelBook¹⁸² releases of the six individual Lucas films

¹⁸² SteelBooks were a brand of metal packaging often used for limited or collector's edition products, which were sought after as collectibles in their own right.

still two years away (and only one SteelBook yet released for the American market – *The Clone Wars* on DVD in 2008¹⁸³), the UK received *Prequel* and *Original Trilogy* Blu-ray sets in limited edition SteelBook cases. Inside this pair of SteelBooks were the same films discs (no bonus discs) and inserts as found in the 2011 UK trilogy releases, including the same disc labels again. The *Prequel Trilogy* featured Yoda on the front and Anakin (with a smaller image of the Mustafar duel) on the back. The *Original Trilogy* featured Vader on the front and the Emperor’s throne room duel on the back. The art from the back of each was actually taken from *The Complete Saga* digibook’s art for ROTJ and ROTJ. Interior artwork was not a single image for either SteelBook. Instead, each side featured artwork from *The Complete Saga*, such that TPM and AOTC were presented inside the *Prequel Trilogy* SteelBook, while ANH and TESB were featured inside the *Original Trilogy* SteelBook. (In other words, the first episode of each trilogy was seen on the left side of the interior, the second on the right side, and the third on the back of the SteelBook. Only the front artwork for the SteelBook was “new,” and it heavily resembled the Yoda and Vader depictions on the 2011 individual trilogy sets.)

These are a bit pricey to come by today, though they can still be found. What is tougher is finding them with the cardboard rings (rather than typical J-cards) that were placed around them when in their original shrink wrap. Those rings only covered the bottom third (or so) and included the *Star Wars* logo, all three film logos, and ratings for the UK and Ireland. Oddly, this meant that when on store shelves, these SteelBooks included the same sets of logos on both top and bottom, making the rings themselves rather redundant.

¹⁸³ See the chapter *Rewriting the Clone Wars* in *Volume III*.



The Prequel Trilogy SteelBook (UK Blu-ray, 2013)



The Original Trilogy SteelBook (UK Blu-ray, 2013)



Exteriors with J-cards



Back covers (without J-cards)



Interiors: *The Prequel Trilogy* (top); *The Original Trilogy* (bottom)

Making History with Diné Bizaad (2013 – 2014)

The United States federal government does not have an official language. Yes, the vast majority of the national government's work is done in American English, and over thirty states have made English their official language, but as a country, America does *not* have an official national language. This is due to our status as a “melting pot” and a heritage that includes native peoples, European colonists, Africans taken across the Atlantic against their will, and subsequent waves of immigration, both large and small. The result is a country wherein over 400 languages are spoken, yet less than half of those languages actually originated here.

By and large, though, with about 80% of people living in America speaking English, the languages of North America's earliest inhabitants, Native Americans (or American Indians, if you prefer), are often left out of discussions about American languages. As a result, many of these native languages are being lost to history as new generations move away from using them regularly.

Manuelito “Manny” Wheeler, director of the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, AZ, was determined to keep the Navajo language, *Diné bizaad* (“people's language”), alive. After successfully convincing Lucasfilm to give its approval, Wheeler and his team of translators and voice actors, all fluent in *Diné bizaad*, managed to translate and dub the entirety of *A New Hope* into the traditional Navajo language. Even the opening crawl text was translated (in text form). This was the first time that a major motion picture was translated and released in this way, paving the way for others like *Finding Nemo* in 2016.

This version of the film, which tends to be referred to today as the *Navajo Language Edition* or just the *Navajo Edition*, premiered at a free screening in 2012 at the Navajo Nation Fair and made its way to a very limited DVD release of 1,500 copies in Dec. 2013 that was primarily marketed to schools and other institutions, with all profits from sales going to the Navajo Parks and Recreation Department. Shortly thereafter, in 2014, Walmart became the first retailer to offer this version of *A New Hope* on DVD to mainstream audiences via its website. (This version of the film was also screened at *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim on Apr. 17, 2015, but that has often been overlooked in light of the 3D version of ROTS premiering at the convention later the same day.)



ANH Navajo Language Edition (DVD, 2013)

Since most fans of the saga have probably never even heard of such a release (unless you happen to follow my *From the Star Wars Home Video Library* series on YouTube or read the first edition of this guide), it is worth breaking down what exactly this release contained. First, it was the most recent version of ANH as of the time of the translation, which meant that this was the same cut as on the 2011 Blu-ray release and the 2013 combo packs about two months earlier. It included English, Spanish, and *Diné bizaad* audio, all in Dolby Digital 5.1, with subtitles available in English and Spanish (but *not* in *Diné bizaad*).

Since there were not yet any individual releases of ANH on Blu-ray, packaging was based on the last time there *was* an individual release, the 2006 DVD package that included the “unaltered” version on a bonus disc. The front dropped the gold or blue banner across the top that declared the 2006 product’s format and status as a “limited edition,” which allowed the logo to be moved higher against the artwork. The artwork itself remained otherwise unchanged. At the bottom, the DVD format logo and THX mastery gold/blue bar was also removed in favor of simple white text against the black background of the artwork, which labeled this as “translated into the Navajo language.”



Cover comparison: *Navajo Language Edition* (left) vs. 2006 widescreen (right)

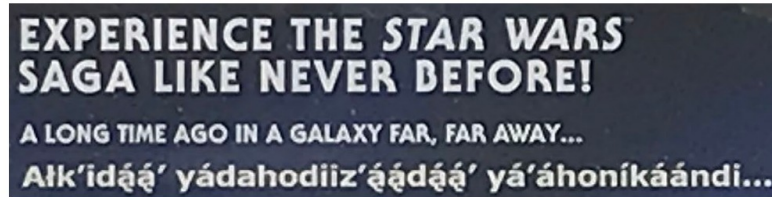
The package's spine shifted elements a bit. Rather than the 2006 release order of (from top to bottom) the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment logo, *Star Wars* logo, *A New Hope* subtitle, *IV* episode number, THX logo, and then Lucasfilm logo, the *Navajo Language Edition* ran as follows: Lucasfilm logo; 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment logo; *Star Wars* logo; *Episode IV A New Hope* title; the phrase "translated into the Navajo Language;" and then the DVD symbol. (The THX logo had been cut.)



Spine comparison: *Navajo Language Edition* (left) vs. 2006 widescreen (right)

The rear of the case always brings a smile to my face. The same tag line kicked it off as in 2006: "Experience the *Star Wars* saga like never before!" No kidding! That phrase has perhaps never been so fitting as on this release. Elements were otherwise tweaked a bit more than on the front.

Information that no longer applied was removed (e.g. notes about containing two versions of the film and disc content). Specifications were moved into a more typical, white table below the artwork. The white *Star Wars* logo was moved to beneath the paragraph of descriptive text, and while the bulk of that text remained unchanged and still in English, this package separated “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away” from the rest of the text so that the *Diné bizaad* version of the phrase could be placed between it and the rest of the text.



Tagline and “A long time ago...” line with Navajo translation of the latter beneath

As for the disc (and, yes, this was a single-disc release), it bore a label similar to the 2013 combo pack’s ANH DVD with the text “Translated into the Navajo language” running across its lower half.

Something like this might stretch the purview of this guide, since it is designed to focus primarily on English language releases, but with something this historically significant and just plain interesting to the educator in me, I couldn’t resist including it. I’m actually rather surprised that the project garnered so little attention outside of New Mexico, Arizona, and Navajo publications and websites.



Back comparison: *Navajo Language Edition* (left) vs. 2006 widescreen (right)

For a More Digital Age (2021)

In early 2021, long after DVD copies of the *Navajo Edition* had become rather hard to come by, this version of ANH (or perhaps I should say “a version of this version”) was released on Disney+. Rather than being added as its own film listing, this alternate version of the film was provided in the bonus features for ANH.

However, it had been tweaked. Rather than being the 2011 cut, it was instead the 2019 “Maclunkey” Disney+ version of the film, which likely just required a tiny break in the audio to allow the extra Greedo shot’s audio to run unaltered (since dialogue was in Huttese). The version on Disney+ was also in 1080p high definition, rather than SD like the DVD, which made it a nicer way to view the *Navajo Edition* (or *Navajo Version*, as it was labeled on Disney+) than on DVD.

Unfortunately, the translated crawl, which was in Navajo on the DVD, was just the regular English crawl on Disney+, making the opening a non-Navajo portion of this otherwise all-Navajo viewing option.

We will see more about Disney+ in *Volumes II* and *III*.

Going Digital (2015)

One competitive realm on the home viewing landscape has thus far been mostly absent from this guide: digital releases. Prior to 2015, all *Star Wars* digital releases (through venues like iTunes, Amazon Video, etc.) had been confined to television series (or the animated film *The Clone Wars* that had essentially been a theatrical pilot for one), making them appropriate for discussion in later chapters that focus on that material. 2008’s *The Clone Wars* film release through Warner Home Video had raised eyebrows by including a digital copy (initially via a disc) alongside its Blu-ray and (most) DVD releases. When the live action films arrived on Blu-ray three years later, many had expected to find digital copy codes included, but none of the films had yet received any kind of digital release. The question of when (surely not *if*) the films would find a home on digital platforms remained unanswered until a mere four days before their arrival.



Bookmark used to promote the *Digital Movie Collection* (front)

On Apr. 6, 2015, the official *Star Wars* website ran an announcement in their news section to reveal that the six live action *Star Wars* films would be released on digital platforms that Friday (Apr. 10, 2015). This short notice heralded a new medium in which the films could thrive and a new range of issues for collectors and more moderate¹⁸⁴ viewers to consider.



Bookmark¹⁸⁵ used to promote the *Digital Movie Collection* (back)

First, digital releases brought questions of whether they could be “collected” at all. Fans used to physical releases were relieved somewhat to find that the films could be downloaded through some platforms (iTunes, for example), yet the discovery that all bonus features were streaming-only, even on platforms that allowed downloading of the films themselves, was a frustration that would return with the Disney films.

Second, there was a question prior to release as to which version of the films would be released digitally, given that the information provided earlier that week had been relatively light on details. Many hoped for the original, theatrical versions of the films (in a format more appropriate for modern viewing than the letterboxed bonus discs of 2006 – 2008), but the versions released were the (mostly expected) 2011 *Even More Special Editions* (the Blu-ray versions) with one minor change to every episode except *A New Hope*.

As part of the original distribution deal between George Lucas (and thus Lucasfilm) and 20th Century Fox, the latter retained distribution rights to ANH in perpetuity, regardless of the medium of release, which therefore included digital releases that were decades away at the time the deal was made. The other five live action films (as of 2015) were part of subsequent arrangements that gave 20th Century Fox distribution rights on *physical*

¹⁸⁴ I used to think I was one of those, but there was a completist hiding deep down.

¹⁸⁵ How could I visualize the digital film release in this guide without taking a screenshot? Bookmark for the win!

media until 2020. This meant that while ANH was required to retain 20th Century Fox branding (and thus its opening logo and classic fanfare music), TESB, ROTJ, and the *Prequel Trilogy* were free of this obligation. As such, when the *Digital Movie Collection*¹⁸⁶ arrived on Apr. 10, all of the films (except ANH) featured a new, truncated fanfare that played over just a Lucasfilm logo, with the 20th Century Fox logo entirely removed from the films.¹⁸⁷ This was met with mostly indifference or scorn, rather than praise, though that appears to stem less from the removal of the 20th Century Fox logo itself than from how poorly the truncated fanfare music was edited, which turned the once comforting opening music into a rather jarring musical cue.

Third, the digital format, free of the constraints of physical storage media, created a possibility for more bonus features, if Lucasfilm were to seize upon the opportunity. They did, after a fashion. Each film's digital release included two new short bonus features: one *Conversations* segment with a brief discussion about something relating to the film in question and one *Discoveries from Inside* segment tending to focus on something from the Lucasfilm archives, such as a look at matte paintings. Alongside this new content, a smattering of bonus content from previous releases, referred to as "legacy" content, was included. Most of this older content came from DVD releases within the previous 14 years, but one (*How Walkers Walk* for TESB) dated all the way back to *The Definitive Collection* LaserDisc set 22 years earlier. (See sidebar for details.)

Fourth, the release of the films outside of physical packaging seemed to encourage the various digital platforms to woo fans through exclusive bonus content. Three did so. (Again, see the sidebar for details.)

Finally, there was the cost to consider. Many fans had already purchased the films multiple times in the past, and with digital copy codes becoming more and more a standard part of Blu-ray releases (at least in the U.S.), the idea of shelling out another \$20 per film (or \$90 for the full set of six on most digital platforms¹⁸⁸) seemed a bridge too far for many potential

¹⁸⁶ I will not be referring to the *Digital Movie Collection* in this guide as the "DMC" because those initials typically refer to Disney Movie Club, which will be relevant to our discussion in subsequent chapters.

¹⁸⁷ Does this make them the *Even More Special Foxless Editions* or something?

¹⁸⁸ Since the package with all six films went up for preorder on some platforms *after* the individual films were already up for preorder, all platforms issued refunds to those who purchased all six films individually for around \$120 so that their purchase matched the later \$90 price.

buyers.¹⁸⁹ Whether purchasing from a streaming-only venue or one allowing downloads, the bonus features remained streaming-only, making archiving them impossible (at least without making an end run around the selling venue's intentions). The files used were indeed the Blu-ray versions (albeit with five truncated fanfares), but they lacked the highest quality audio option available on the physical copies, opting for 5.1 Dolby Digital over 6.1 DTS-HD, which frustrated audiophiles. Thus, the 2015 digital release was a non-starter for some fans and simply redundant for many others.

The path some fans expected or hoped for, which would have been to add free digital copies to physical ones, was off the table, as it would have taken an agreement between Walt Disney Company and 20th Century Fox¹⁹⁰ to have any chance of happening. Meanwhile, *two* more Blu-ray releases of each film were coming just a few months down the line.

**Forever Tinkering:
The Lucas Films Go Digital (2015)**

As noted previously, these were the 2011 Blu-ray cuts of the films with only a minor alteration: removing the 20th Century Fox fanfare and replacing it with a truncated Lucasfilm-only fanfare for each of the films except for ANH.

The new fanfares were jarring as hell, but we lived with them because we were finally able to view the films digitally, which gave them a level of portability that had not previously existed. Those truncated fanfares (and, in fact, these specific minor new cuts of all but ANH) would cease to be available in 2019.¹⁹¹

For a More Digital Age (2015)

While the *Digital Movie Collection* was made available on nearly all of the major digital platforms, it was not available as a set of six films on Disney's own Disney Movies Anywhere. Since this is the first time this viewing

¹⁸⁹ We are close enough to 2020 now that prices were fairly close to what they would be if adjusted for inflation, so there is no need for continued conversions.

¹⁹⁰ ...or Walt Disney Company purchasing 20th Century Fox away from 21st Century Fox...

¹⁹¹ See the chapter *All Together Now* in *Volume II*.

venue has entered into our coverage of the live action *Star Wars* films, now is a good time to consider its launch (just one year earlier), laudable synchronization features, and (for *Star Wars* fans) unfortunate limitations.

Disney had launched DMA as a streaming retailer and digital locker on Feb. 10, 2014. Its most important feature was its ability to synchronize with other platforms to allow content purchased on one platform to be available on others without separate purchases. This began with iTunes in Feb. 2014, then expanded to include Google Play and Vudu in Nov. 2014, followed by Amazon Video and Microsoft purchases in Sept. 2015. Verizon Fios, technically a television provider instead of an independent streaming platform, joined the long list of synchronizing providers in Aug. 2016. Microsoft purchases would cease to synchronize in Sept. 2017 when support temporarily ended.

DMA eventually expanded to include content from numerous other studios when relaunched in Oct. 2017 as Movies Anywhere (sans “Disney”). Microsoft synchronization would return to the revamped platform in Aug. 2018.

So, why wasn't the *Digital Movie Collection* available as a set of six films on Disney Movies Anywhere, given that it was available that way on other platforms? It was because the digital distribution rights for ANH were tied up with all of its other distribution rights with 20th Century Fox in perpetuity, while the *digital* versions of the other films were not part of their *physical* distribution deal that was to keep them with 20th Century Fox until 2020. Thus, DMA could not release all six films in a single collection, given that ANH could not be among them. Instead, *Episodes I – III* and *V – VI* were released separately. This would continue to be an issue until the relaunch of Disney Movies Anywhere as Movies Anywhere with support from 20th Century Fox in 2017.

Platform issues aside, what bonus features did the *Digital Movie Collection* have to offer?

The new *Conversations* content included (in film order): *Designing Episode I: Doug Chiang Looks Back* (which didn't actually have him conversing with anyone); *Sounds in Space* (with Ben Burtt and Matthew Wood); *The Star Wars That Almost Was* (with Pablo Hidalgo and the late J.W. Rinzler); *Creating a Universe* (with Roger Christian and Joe Johnston); *The Lost Interviews* (classic audio interviews with images added to make them video content); and *The Effects* (with Dennis Muren, Phil Tippet, Roger Guyett, and John Knoll).

The new *Discoveries from Inside* content included (in film order): *Models and Miniatures*; *Costumes Revealed*; *Hologram and Bloopers*; *Weapons and the First Lightsaber*; *Matte Paintings Unveiled*; and *The Sounds of Ben Burtt*.

A new featurette called *George Lucas on the Digital Revolution* was considered a bonus feature for ROTJ, though it would later be extended to

be part of the extras for all six films.

“Legacy” (i.e. reused) content varied widely between films.

For TPM, legacy content included *The Beginning* (from the original DVD release), the theatrical version of the podrace, and deleted scenes (all of those from the original DVD release except the air taxi sequence that was incorporated back into the film, “Dawn Before the Race,” and “Farewell to Jira,” plus all of the deleted scenes from the Blu-ray release except “The Battle is Over” and “Extended Podrace Wager”).

For AOTC, legacy content included several featurettes from the original DVD release: *From Puppets to Pixels*; *State of the Art*; *Films are Not Released: They Escape*; and the visual effects montage. Deleted scenes were included from the original DVD release (except “Padmé Address the Senate,” “Extended Arrival on Naboo,” “Padmé’s Bedroom,” and “Anakin and Padmé on Trial”) and Blu-ray (except “Lost Twenty,” “Extended Speeder Chase,” and “Anakin and Ruwee”).

For ROTS, legacy content included: *Within a Minute* (from the original DVD release), *The Journey, Parts 1 and 2* and ILM SIGGRAPH reel (from the official *Star Wars* website); and deleted scenes (all of those from the original DVD release except “A Stirring in the Senate” and “Confronting the Chancellor,” plus all of the ones from the Blu-ray release except “Elevator Antics,” “Escape Through the Hangar,” “Changes to the Constitution,” “Utapau Chase Animatics,” “Mustafar Duel Animatics,” “Mustafar Duel/Lava River Animatics,” “Kashyyyk Attack,” “Order 66 Animatic,” “Jedi Imposters at the Temple,” and “Senate Duel Animatics.”

Legacy content for ANH included: *Anatomy of a Denback* (from the official *Star Wars* website); the launch trailer from the film (found on places like the 2004 DVD release’s bonus materials disc); and all the deleted scenes from the *Original Trilogy* bonus disc in *The Complete Saga*.

Legacy content for TESB included content from *The Complete Saga*. The full *A Conversation with the Masters: The Empire Strikes Back 30 Years Later* was carried over, along with *Lucas on the Force*, *George Lucas on Editing The Empire Strikes Back*, and all of the deleted scenes from that set except “Luke’s Recovery,” “Luke and Leia: Medical Center,” “The Fate of General Veers,” and “Leia Tends to Luke.” (Given which deleted scenes were left out, it was as if someone in the decision-making process wasn’t particularly comfortable with how close Luke and Leia sometimes came before knowing they were siblings.) As mentioned previously, one bonus feature was actually from *The Definitive Collection*: the *How Walkers Walk* featurette.

Legacy content for ROTJ included: the entire *Classic Creatures: Return of the Jedi* documentary (found, among other places, on *The Complete Saga* documentaries/spoofs disc); a few trailers and TV spots that had been found on the 2004 DVD set’s bonus materials disc (the *Revenge of the Jedi*

teaser; the launch trailer; the *It Began* TV spot; and the *Climactic Chapter* TV spot); and all of the deleted scenes from *The Complete Saga*.

Three platforms offered exclusive content to draw fans to their marketplace when hunting the *Digital Movie Collection*. On Amazon Video, customers could view each film with an “X-ray” subtitle track that provided interesting trivia about that film. Disney Movies Anywhere offered the exclusive *The Art of Attack of the Clones*¹⁹² and *Scrap Into Gold: A Conversation with Roger Christian* bonus features. Microsoft Video did not offer exclusive video content but instead leaned toward their own Xbox gaming platforms by providing an R2-D2 avatar companion for Xbox 360 and Xbox One, along with *Star Wars Pinball* content for the *Pinball FX 2* video game.¹⁹³

Go Figure: Hasbro Commemorates Home Video *The Digital Movie Collection* (2015)

By 2015, Hasbro had released 26 *Star Wars* action figure packs to celebrate physical *Star Wars* home video releases.¹⁹⁴ With the digital premiere of *Episodes I – VI*, it was time for one last burst of multiple action figure packs to celebrate the event (the only time such a product line was released to coincide with a product that was digital, rather than physical). These would be considered part of the *Rebels* product line, though without any tie to that series.

Similar to the approach taken in 2011, Hasbro released six action figure packs this year, one for each of the six films that had just made their digital

¹⁹² Yes, even if you purchased one of the *other* films, this bonus feature was always *The Art of Attack of the Clones*. No, it never really made sense.

¹⁹³ At one point, it was rumored that a series of videos called *Star Wars at Lightspeed* that were exclusive to Disney Movies Anywhere would be available as a preorder bonus through DMA. This was not true. Instead, *Star Wars at Lightspeed* videos were available to anyone for free on DMA and had no connection to digital film purchases or preorders.

¹⁹⁴ We have seen 20 of these so far: 3 for the *Original Trilogy* in 2004; 3 for *ROTS* in 2005; 3 for the *Original Trilogy* in 2006; 6 for *The Complete Saga* in 2011; and 5 based on *The Complete Saga*'s *ROTJ* deleted scenes in 2012. We will see six more as we examine the *Clone Wars* micro-series (2005) and *The Clone Wars* theatrical film (2008) in *Volume III*.

debut. Each pack again included four figures and was not exclusive to any particular retailer. Rather than including separate mini-posters, poster art was on the back of an inner box that contained the figures. A slipcover then slid over that box to present an image of the content on the front, other packs' content on the back, *Star Wars* on one spine (like both sides of the inner box), and a spine image on the opposite side that would merge with the other boxes' spine art to create a single image, similar to the spine imagery of the 2011 sets.

The spine image was somewhat "busy." The top of each package included the film's name as (from top to bottom) "Episode," then its episode number (as a Roman numeral, of course), and finally the film's title. A *Star Wars* logo (in outline form) spread across the middle of the entire combined image. Darth Vader looked down from the upper area of the four middle packages (*Episodes II – V*), while Maul looked down from the TPM box and Luke from the ROTJ box. A faint image of the Mustafar duel from ROTS appeared around the center of the image, slightly offset to the left. Other characters then filled out the rest of the space, including (roughly counter-clockwise from below and to the right of Maul): Mace Windu; a B1 battle droid; R2-D2; a clone trooper; Darth Sidious; a stormtrooper; Yoda; Boba Fett; Chewbacca; and Han.

Poster art on inner package backs was just the artwork from each original poster (i.e. no cast/crew information) with the film's logo in the bottom left corner. Logos were in the form introduced with TPM, which included the *Star Wars* logo along a top horizontal line, above the episode number, which itself was atop another horizontal line, followed by the episode's name. Five pieces of poster art were the same as those used for the 2011 figure packs: the Drew Struzan version B posters for all three prequels; Tom Jung's style A poster for ANH; and Kazuhiko Sano's style B poster for ROTJ. Rather than using Roger Kastel's style A poster for TESB, however, this set used Tom Jung's style B poster art, which had been more common on home video releases in places like the UK.

With the actual figures hidden beneath the slipcover, this was the only commemorative figure pack collection that did not make the actual figures visible to the buyer. The packages were also the only ones since the packs launched in 2004 to include multiple languages on the cover instead of just English. (This was presumably due to being sold in multiple markets without the expense of producing multiple packaging variants.)

A Saga on Home Video: A Fan's Guide to U.S. *Star Wars* Home Video Releases



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for TPM (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for AOTC (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for ROTS (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for ANH (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for TESB (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)



Digital Release Commemorative Collection for ROTJ (2015) – cover (left); inner box front showing figures (center); poster art on back of inner box (right)

The TPM pack included Padmé Amidala, Darth Maul, R2-D2, and a B1 battledroid. The pack for AOTC included Mace Windu, Jango Fett, a clone

trooper, and a super battledroid. The ROTS pack included Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, and Darth Sidious (actually identified as such, rather than as “Emperor Palpatine” as in all previous commemorative packs). The ANH pack included Han Solo, Chewbacca, C-3PO, and a stormtrooper. The pack for TESB included Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, Bossk, and IG-88. The final pack in this collection was for ROTJ and included Boba Fett, Wicket W. Warrick, a biker scout (scout trooper), and Luke Skywalker.

Strangely, Leia Organa was not included in this product line, nor was she included on the artwork that was formed by placing each box side-by-side. (Padmé was not included in the artwork either, but at least she had a figure in the TPM pack.)



Full spine artwork

Perhaps even stranger, the pack for TESB (but *only* that pack) suddenly reappeared on store shelves at some retailers (e.g. Target) in late 2020, supposedly to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of TESB. The product was unchanged, meaning that it was “celebrating the anniversary” through being made available again, yet *everything* else about the product was celebrating the digital release five years earlier.

What certainly *wasn't* at all strange was that this product line was items we'd seen before. Figures were simply repackaged from lines in 2012 (Padmé), 2013 (B1 battledroid, R2-D2, super battle droid, clone trooper, Mace, Jango, Obi-Wan, Anakin, stormtrooper, Han, C-3PO, Chewbacca, and Boba), 2014 (Maul, Yoda, Sidious, Vader, and both Lukes), and 2015

(Bossk, IG-88, Wicket, and biker scout)

Spectacles for the Spectacle (2015)

Revenge of the Sith

Fans had known since early 2013 that any hopes of seeing theatrical 3D releases of *Episodes II – VI* were likely entirely in vain. Disney had shifted focus away from that project to focus instead on new films. As with *Attack of the Clones*, however, 3D conversion was completed for *Revenge of the Sith*. Thus, the entire 3D *Prequel Trilogy*, including the never-before-seen 3D version of ROTS, was screened for fans at the first *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim (Apr. 16 – 19, 2015).¹⁹⁵ This very limited opportunity provided one final set of 3D glasses for the *Prequel Trilogy* but just the first of *seven* different pairs of *Star Wars* RealD 3D glasses for 2015.¹⁹⁶

The *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim glasses were marked as a “collectible keepsake” but were the closest to standard, black RealD 3D glasses that the saga had seen thus far. Frames and temples were simply black. Like the previous convention pairs, these glasses included the RealD 3D logo on the left temple and the convention’s logo on the right.

¹⁹⁵ TPM and AOTC were shown in 3D on Apr. 17, while ROTS premiered in 3D (with an introduction by Dennis Muren and Ian McDiarmid) before a 2D screening of ANH on Apr. 18. TESB and ROTJ (in 2D, of course) followed on Apr. 19.

¹⁹⁶ We will, of course, see the other six when discussing *The Force Awakens* in the chapter *Enter: Disney* in *Volume II*.



ROTS RealD 3D glasses (2013) – *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim



Right temple

Of Neglect and SteelBooks (2015)

The Complete Saga was reissued on Blu-ray as a six-film set with all nine discs on Oct. 13, 2015, just six months after the launch of the *Digital Movie Collection*. In an Aug. 5, 2015, news byte on the official *Star Wars* website, the reissue was announced at the same time as a series of individual film Blu-ray releases in limited edition, SteelBook packaging. Of 215 words in the article, the reissued *Complete Saga* rated only 40. All eyes were on the SteelBooks, leaving this edition neglected in both the original notice and subsequent articles reporting on the announcement on various entertainment websites. It should come as no surprise that this version of *The Complete Saga* was initially missed by many fans and often misunderstood.



The Complete Saga (Blu-ray, 2015)

The new *Complete Saga* featured the same discs as in 2011, simply placed in new packaging. The packaging included a large but standard style Blu-ray case with a cardboard slipcover, similar to the 2011 and 2013 trilogy sets. This new packaging, which featured Darth Vader, seemed to be a direct answer to calls from fans to replace the cardboard digibook packaging of the 2011 set with a safer (albeit less flashy) way of containing their discs.

The interior of the large case also presented new images (through the semi-transparent blue surface) of one shot from each film (*Prequel Trilogy* on the left, *Original Trilogy* on the right). These included (in order): Qui-Gon Jinn and Anakin Skywalker in Mos Espa; Separatist forces early in the Battle of Geonosis; the Mustafar landscape; Luke walking out of his home on Tatooine for his iconic “twin suns” shot; Luke’s sunken X-wing on Dagobah; and the *Millennium Falcon* amid the chaotic Battle of Endor.

The insert (AKA the *Guide to the Galaxy*) was visually redesigned as well, though it kept to the idea of two-page spreads that drove the look of its 2011 counterpart. Paper was now much glossier, and the cover featured the second Death Star over the forest moon of Endor (with TIE fighters approaching it if one opened the booklet to show front and back covers as a single image). Bonus content listings made up three of the spreads again, while a single image dominated the center spread, and cast/crew information appeared on the final spread. Images in the top right corner of the pages containing bonus disc information were no longer just rectangular (with a more stylized, angular look instead) and included a single character or item over their right side. For the first bonus disc spread, this was the Mustafar landscape with a B1 battledroid. For the second bonus disc spread, it was one of the AT-ATs during the Battle of Hoth with a snowspeeder over the right side. The third bonus disc spread included a Geonosis image on the right page with a clone trooper (Cody) over it, while the left side had an image (but no character), showing the clone troopers

boarding ships. The center spread image was not from the films but captured the feel of Anakin's transformation into Vader by showing Vader's arm holding his helmet (in an almost Shakespearean homage to *Hamlet*), while Darth Sidious grins maniacally in the background.

It is worth noting before moving on that this set was released *only* on Blu-ray in the United States. A 12-disc DVD set in similar packaging is often seen floating around eBay, Amazon Marketplace, and other sites which allow users to sell goods that are not part of the site's official retail inventory. That 12-disc set may appear to be this Blu-ray reissue's DVD counterpart, but it is *not* an official release. It is merely a very convincing bootleg and should be avoided by those seeking legitimate releases of the films.¹⁹⁷

Less than a month later, on Nov. 10, 2015, all six live action films were released individually on Blu-ray for the first time. Each was encased in a SteelBook (a brand name metal case variant sometimes used for higher end, limited edition, or retailer exclusive, disc-based releases) with new artwork of Maul, Yoda, Grievous, Vader, a stormtrooper, and Palpatine, respectively, with a logo for the corresponding film (the *Star Wars* logo with the title in plain, colored text beneath) in either the left or right corner.

The back of each SteelBook featured existing poster art: Drew Struzan's version B for each prequel film; Tom Jung's style A for ANH; Roger Kastel's style A for TESB; and Kazuhiko Sano's style B for ROTJ. Interiors included artwork spread across both sides that illustrated (in order): Anakin being tested by the Jedi Council; clone troopers boarding transports; the Mustafar duel (the same old version of the image seen countless times already); Luke looking out at the binary sunset on Tatooine; AT-ATs at the Battle of Hoth; and the space battle above the forest moon of Endor.

This was neither the first time that the U.S. saw a *Star Wars* theatrical film in SteelBook form, nor the first time the live action films saw a SteelBook release on the world stage. However, given that the first instance of the former had been a Best Buy exclusive version of *The Clone Wars* on DVD¹⁹⁸, and the latter had been the Blu-ray trilogy sets in an edition exclusive to regions like the UK in 2013, these 2015 SteelBooks made quite a splash on the U.S. home video market, even often being cited erroneously as the first *Star Wars* SteelBooks ever. Unfortunately, by being single-disc

¹⁹⁷ More on this and a few other prominent bootlegs in the chapter *This is the Way* in *Volume III*.

¹⁹⁸ See the chapter *Rewriting the Clone Wars* in *Volume III*.

reissues of the same film discs released in 2011, 2013, and one month earlier, the SteelBook reissues included only the audio commentaries. The rest of the bonus features could only be found on the extra three discs in *The Complete Saga*, usually ignored on store shelves in its new packaging in favor of the SteelBooks. Speaking of “stores shelves,” we should also note that, unlike every other *Star Wars* SteelBook release in the United States, these were *not* exclusive to Best Buy, nor to any other particular retailer. These were the only general release *Star Wars* SteelBooks in the U.S. to date.



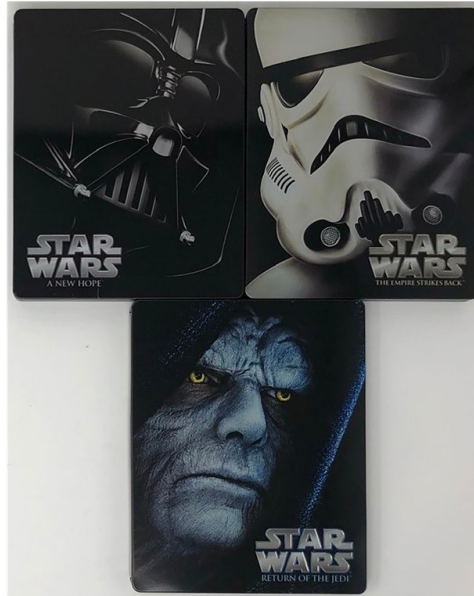
TPM, AOTC, and ROTS limited edition SteelBooks (Blu-ray, 2015)



TPM, AOTC, and ROTS back cover art



TPM, AOTC, and ROTS interiors



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ limited edition SteelBooks (Blu-ray, 2015)



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ back cover art



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ interiors

These six SteelBook releases were also noteworthy in that this was the first time since 2006 that the films needed individualized designs for their packaging, which included the cardboard J-cards that acted as the back of the cases when still in shrink wrap. The “back” designs from this product line (and a UK DVD line we will see in the next sidebar) would later form the basis for many of the supposedly “new” back designs for the black-bordered film releases in 2019 and 2020 in many regions, including the U.S.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ See the chapter *All Together Now* for more on the black-bordered product line of



2015 TPM comparison: UK DVD (left) vs. U.S. SteelBook J-card (right)



2015 TESB comparison: UK DVD (left) vs. U.S. SteelBook J-card (right)

Before we leave this subject, one other point of clarification is perhaps warranted. Because of the aforementioned distribution deals with 20th Century Fox, this year's Blu-ray products, as with those in 2011 and 2013, continued to be released through 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, not Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment. As such, they each featured

2019 – 2020 and the outright debacle it became in the U.S.

the 20th Century Fox fanfare opening, rather than the truncated openings that only appeared on 2015's *Digital Movie Collection* release (for all but ANH).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom (2015)

As we will see later in the chapter *All Together Now* in *Volume II*, the U.S. did not see individual releases of the 2011 cuts of *Episodes I – VI* on DVD (with the exception of the *Navajo Edition* of ANH) until 2019. Until then, the only ways to acquire the 2011 cuts on DVD in America were through the 2013 Blu-ray/DVD combo packs and a subsequent Walmart exclusive reissue of those packs in 2017.²⁰⁰

In the UK, however, this was not an issue. On June 1, 2015, all six films (in their 2011 incarnations) were released individually on DVD in cases that bore existing poster art on their covers. In one of the few instances of one artist's work being used across a full set of releases, the poster used for each was by Drew Struzan: the version B posters for the prequel films and the *Special Edition* theatrical posters for the *Original Trilogy* films. (The latter were thought of as a single poster series, so these were known as the version B, C, and D posters for the *Special Editions*, respectively.)



TPM, AOTC, and ROTS (UK DVD, 2015)

²⁰⁰ See the chapter *Enter: Disney* in *Volume II*.



ANH, TESB, and ROTJ (UK DVD, 2015)

Discs were just the same DVDs seen previously in 2013, but fans could pick and choose which films to purchase, rather than being locked into purchasing full trilogies.

Conclusion: Imperfect Excellence

When the *Star Wars* live action films reached DVD, especially in the case of 2004's *Original Trilogy* set, what should have been a joyous moment was shadowed a bit by frustration with changes to the films. Unfortunately, the same proved true for the films' premiere on Blu-ray and in digital form. While a more cynical observer might simply chalk both instances up to unrealistic expectations or fans "always" being unhappy with whatever we get, regardless of its quality, I would argue that the changes made to the films and some poor choices in promotion and pricing, along with repeated reissues (nothing new for *Star Wars*, to be fair) had left fans a bit jaded. Add in the prevalence of social media by this point in the saga's life cycle, and one could only expect controversy and a fair amount of naysaying.

That said, official home video releases of George Lucas' six live action *Star Wars* films had never looked crisper or sounded better than on Blu-ray. Regardless of scene or sound changes that rankled fans of specific versions of the films, the idea that the films could look and sound this good (even with the color issues in the *Original Trilogy*'s 1080p scan), especially when the film that started it all was nearing its 40th anniversary, was something that would have been considered impossible for the first two (maybe three) decades of the saga's life. If this was just the ground floor of *Star Wars* in

high definition (and beyond), the future looked bright indeed.

If only George could stop fiddling with the damned things.

By 2015, though, Lucas was gone, and a new *Star Wars* film without him at the helm would end the year dominating the box office.

The question was: How would Disney treat the saga on home video?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nathan P. Butler is the author of several fiction works, including tales in his own universes, novellas for Decipher's *WARS* franchise, short stories for Jim Wylder's *10,000 Dawns* universe, and, most notably for *Star Wars* fans, the short *Star Wars* comic story "Equals and Opposites" for *Star Wars Tales*. (A Hasbro Comic Pack was later based on his *Star Wars Tales* story, making him the proud "storytelling papa" of a pair of action figures). He was also a contributor of dates for dated battle maps in Jason Fry and Dan Wallace's *Star Wars: The Essential Atlas* (in which he was able to officially set the Legends continuity's digital calendar start date for *Return of the Jedi*, 39:3:3). He has also contributed to non-fiction works on science fiction subjects in the pages of several Sequart essay collections and elsewhere.

In *Star Wars* fandom, he was one of the earliest *Star Wars* podcasters (2002 – 2020) and the creator/compiler of the *Star Wars* chronology project now known as *The Star Wars Timeline Gold* (1997 – 2018). He wrote and co-produced the first serious *Star Wars* fan-made audio drama released online (*Second Strike*, 2002 – 2003). Today, he produces content on Patreon and YouTube, including the series that gave birth to this book, the ongoing *From the Star Wars Home Video Library*.

By day, he is a professional social studies (history, economics, etc.) educator, having taught for over twelve years in a traditional high school classroom before becoming the first full-time social studies educator for his county's innovative online program, where he has (since Jan. 2015) led a growing social studies team, teaching students in grades six through twelve.

Originally from Evansville, IN, Butler now resides in the Atlanta metro area with his amazing fellow-fan wife Jodi (see the Introduction), his fan-in-training son Cade (yes, named after Cade Skywalker), and their cat. He can usually be found working in service to his students in his *Star Wars*-themed office in the Butler home, while Cade plays alongside him.

ALSO BY NATHAN P. BUTLER

Original Universes

Greater Good (novel)

Echoes (novella)

(available together in *Greater Good and Echoes*)

WARS Novellas

WARS: The Battle of Phobos: Healers and Hunters (*Earthers*, Vol. 1)

(collected in *WARS: The Battle of Phobos: Preludes*)

WARS: The Battle of Phobos: On Red Soil (*Earthers*, Vol. 2)

(collected in *WARS: The Battle of Phobos: Stretti*)

10,000 Dawns Short Stories

“Unpleasant Realities”

“The Road to Hell is Paved with Legislation”

(both collected in *10,000 Dawns: Poor Man’s Iliad*)

Star Wars Comic

“Equals and Opposites” in *Star Wars Tales* issue 21

(collected in *Star Wars Tales*, Vol. 6)

(reissued as a Hasbro Comic Pack with

Kyle Katarn and Yuuzhan Vong action figures)

Star Wars Essay Collections (Contributor)

A Long Time Ago: Exploring the Star Wars Cinematic Universe

A Galaxy Far, Far Away: Exploring Star Wars Comics

A More Civilized Age: Exploring the Star Wars Expanded Universe

Blade Runner Essay Collection (Contributor)

The Cyberpunk Nexus: Exploring the Blade Runner Universe

Other Star Wars Contributions

Dated battle maps for *Star Wars: The Essential Atlas* (official)

Timeline for *Star Wars Super Collector’s Wish Book*, 4th Ed. (unofficial)

The Force Awakens preview article for *Movie Magic* magazine (unofficial)